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LADY
GOODCHILD'S
FAIRY RING



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P R E F A C E.

IT is many years since a collection of Fairy Tales for the reading of children has been possible. In fact, the incursion of the learned upon Fairy Land would seem to have frightened those “delicate spirits” and their merry concert from among us.

“For now the swain
Returning late, may pass the woods in vain,
And never hope to see the nigh’tly train.”

Whether it be, that I am the owner of an ancient mansion in the west of England, deeply embowered in old ancestral woods, abounding in glades where the Fairy Rings have been for centuries respected, or that I am regarded as a special friend, certain it is, that I have been highly favoured by communications from those tiny beings. I have been permitted to see them in their robes of emerald-green, with the diamond dew-drops shining on them, dancing a merry round in the soft light of the summer moon. Thanks, moreover, to a grand-daughter of the famous Mother Bunch, who resides in a small cottage on my family estate, and to whom I have been able to be useful in many neighbourly matters, I have been entrusted

with a curious manuscript volume, containing a fasciculus or nosegay of Fairy Traditions. These I now send forth to the world for the edification and delectation of young people, with whom the Fairies and Flower-maidens of the Forest desire, through me, once more to communicate.

No one can imagine the inexpressible pleasure with which I have engaged myself in the issuing of this rare treasury of Fairy Lore to the juvenile world. I feel conscious that I am about to impart gladness to many a young heart, to delight many a parent's eye, at seeing the joy of his children, on his presenting them with this miscellany of entertainment, fancy and delight. The kind philosopher who desired his memory to be preserved, by a holiday given to all the children of his country on the anniversary of his death, was scarcely as happy in his invention for immortality as I feel myself to be, in undertaking the publication of this work, and in henceforth associating my name with those of my illustrious predecessors, who have dug out jewels from the dark mine of tradition, and formed from them a shining crown, to adorn the brows of rejoicing childhood.

Of this new collection of Fairy Tales, I may point out one especial recommendation, that it supplies a want much felt by parents of something that may be read by children, in that intermediate period of education, when the young mind, as yet not strong enough for graver studies, is, nevertheless, eager and ready to receive instruction when blended with amusement—when the newly

awakened desire for reading requires to be encouraged with food that delights rather than repels, and is so led up to a preparation for more serious pursuits.

The fascinating interest of these tales; the elegant fancy that pervades them throughout; the charming beauty of their numerous illustrations, are such as to render them irresistibly attractive to the juvenile reader while the parent may rest assured that there is nothing in them which the most fastidious, or most careful, would wish to avoid placing before the pure unsullied mind of childhood. The moral and the instructive are here not blankly and boldly thrust forward; but are, nevertheless, presented under a guise which, while it awakens the fancy, ensures the attention; and impresses, while it delights, the newly kindled faculties of the young scholar.

SARAH GOODCHILD.

MOUNT FIDGET.



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1



Lady Goodchild's Fairy Ring.

THE PRINCESS ROSE.

ONCE upon a time, there was a king and a queen in a country where all was so good and so beautiful, that everyone therein lived happily, and nothing ever went wrong. Yet, with all this, since perfect felicity cannot be hoped for anywhere, the inhabitants of even this delightful country had occasional intervals of weariness and melan-

choly. Whether it was, that the very weight of their riches fatigued them, there was always a something wanting to their thorough enjoyment ; yet not one of the wise men among them could divine the reason why.

Now the King and the Queen of this wonderful country, whose palace was built of diamonds and rubies, who had servants with wings that they might be the better waited upon, who were arrayed in robes of gold and silver tissue, and who, to crown this, had all the most exquisite things in the world at their choice ; this King and this Queen, we say, were without any child ; and children, we know, are the bright stars of life. Their want of children, then, was a great source of grief to the royal pair.

The Queen, however, having a friend who was a Fairy with a palase in the clouds, prevailed upon her to sympathise with her chagrin ; and requested her to use her magic power, that a pretty little baby girl might be added to the royal family. The Fairy kindly replied, that the Queen's wish should be gratified.

So it happened, that some days after, when the Queen was walking among the flowers in her garden, she observed something gently moving under a bush of charmingly perfumed roses, and, on going near, perceived, lying on a bed of soft moss, the prettiest little girl that ever was seen ; fair as a lily, with cheeks like a blush-rose, and beautiful blue eyes. She hastened to take up the infant, and caress it warmly ; indeed, so great was her joy, that she could not help shedding tears, while from the very bottom of her heart she rendered thanks to the good Fairy for the happiness thus bestowed upon her. At that moment a cloud came sailing from the sky, and the Fairy stepped down from it, smiling and radiant with a light, soft yet sparkling, as the dawn of day ; then, addressing the Queen, she spoke as follows :—

" Fair Queen, I have given you what you asked of me ; that gift is the most precious of all treasures ; it is yours to guard it with your utmost care. You must watch over it, as well as tenderly nurse it. The spirit of this little one I place in your hands, to develop it for good. It is your duty to commit that sacred office to no other person ;

for a mother who knows not how to fulfil a trust so precious, is greatly to be blamed, and stores up for herself, in the future, the bitterest remorse. The mother's care is to a child what the sun is to the flower; it develops and cherishes its life. The same prudence which would prevent you entrusting your jewel casket to the care of servants, should, in a greater degree, prohibit your confiding to such persons a treasure so great as I give you, in this infant. I am willing to take upon myself the office of her godmother, and I now bestow upon her the name of Rose, in remembrance of the charming rose-tree which served her for a cradle. Be thou, fair Queen, a good mother to this babe, and, in return, she will be a good daughter to thee!"

The Fairy then remounted her cloud-chariot, and vanished in the far-off sky.

No sooner was she out of sight, than the Queen set off running towards the palace, to show this pretty little girl to the King, her husband. All the Court were called in to look at it. A lovely white she-goat was brought in to suckle it; and a cradle of gold, lined with soft-wadded silk, for it to lie upon, with lace curtains, as fine as the finest cobweb, to shade it while sleeping. All the Fairies came together to the palace, and vied with each other in the most charming presents. The little girl never uttered a wish that was not satisfied on the instant; and so it went on, until she had reached the age of ten years, without having shed a tear, or felt even the slightest vexation.

The King and the Queen were the happiest parents in the world; yet, after all, a serious thought would sometimes cross their minds, at seeing their daughter apparently indifferent to all their wealth, and the many pleasures provided for her. She was happy; nevertheless, she occasionally wore an air of sadness; she seemed to feel a languor, a vague desire of something, which could neither be explained, nor distinctly stated.

In a word, in this happy country, where sorrow was unknown, the Princess Rose was seen, all at once, to become languishing and ill. Now, in such a country, as might be expected, there were no doctors; for no complaint had

ever been heard of there. What was to be done? The Queen had again recourse to her friend, the Fairy, who came as quickly as possible to the summons; but even the Fairy could not understand the case of the young Princess.

As no one could tell to what cause the wretchedness which hung over the Princess was to be attributed, the Fairy said to the Queen:—

“At some distance from here, there are countries where physicians abound; and, possibly, in them there may be similar maladies to that which afflicts our dear child. I will take her with me in my cloud-chariot, and we will go and consult one of their celebrated doctors.”

The Queen, who had never left the little Princess since her birth, was much troubled at parting with her, even for a few hours. However, she at last consented, especially as the journey could not be a very long one; for those who travel on the clouds go very fast indeed.

The Fairy and the Princess Rose traversed a great space before they descended to the earth. The place they landed upon bore very little resemblance to that they had recently quitted. Here were poor people, without food to eat, or clothes to wear; dwelling in wretched huts, built, for the most part, of mud, and thatched with straw; swarming with dirty children, puny, and half famished. It is true there were plenty of palaces as well, and rich people, and princes, and great lords; but these scarcely troubled themselves about their unfortunate fellow-citizens, the poor receiving from them neither care nor succour.

Before the Princess and the Fairy could arrive at the house of the celebrated physician whom they were going to consult, it was necessary for them to pass through a great portion of the town. At the sight of the poor children, with naked feet, and scarcely clothes to cover them, asking for bread, and begging an alms, the Princess Rose felt her heart swell, till she was almost choked with emotion; she burst into tears; her gentle sorrows fell down her cheeks like a kindly dew, and each tear was turned into a pearl of beauty as it came from her eyes; for they were tears of pity. It was then she felt a gentle

joy penetrate her heart, as the thought occurred to her, how she might employ the immense riches of her parents in warding off starvation and cold from these poor people.

"My dear Godmother," said she, addressing the Fairy, "I have no longer any need of a physician; I see already



what was my complaint, and I know what will cure it. I was sad, because, if there are Fairies, there are also Angels; and the voice of one of those Angels has reached me. The wealth of my parents could not make me happy

while applied to my own use only. I have dreamed—although I knew nothing of it—of the wretchedness which I now see ; and I feel that it is in acts of charity I must find my happiness."

The Fairy recognised at once the truth of what the Princess said, from the heavenly joy which diffused itself over the whole countenance of the charming Rose.

" Come then, dear child," she replied, " and fulfil your mission."

On a sudden, at the waving of her magic wand, the King and Queen appeared, attended by all their Court, and followed by servants, who bore immense coffers, filled with gold and ready-made garments. Next came, in procession, all the poor people: the children first, and then the old men and their wives, in which order they arranged themselves in front of the riches that dazzled their eyes.

The Princess Rose engaged herself gladly in the delightful task of distributing to all whatever it might be that they most wanted. To the little children she gave frocks and petticoats; but did not forget to add some playthings also; on the old people and their wives she bestowed money. The joy of the children, the happiness of the old people, and the looks of the Princess Rose, radiant with benevolence, formed a scene so touching, that the King, the Queen, and the Courtiers, affected by her example, felt an inclination to follow it; nor was it long before the coffers were entirely emptied of their contents.

Desirous of completing the happiness of the day, the Fairy touched, with her wand, all the poor and squalid huts. These, on the instant, were transformed into pretty cottages, surrounded with green turf; each had a poultry-yard full of fine fowls and handsome ducks, with a cow lowing in every shed. After this, she turned to the mansions of the hard-hearted rich men; and cast upon them a spell, by which, in an instant, they became covered all over with some black colour, that nothing could rub off; in addition to which ugly owls came and built their nests under the roof of every house; where they kept up such a perpetual hooting and screaming through the night, that not one of the inhabitants could get a wink of sleep.

They tried every means for getting rid of these horrible creatures, but in vain. No one could hit them, although all the volunteer riflemen were called out for the purpose. The shots in their guns changed into crumbs of bread ; and they found it useless to continue firing.

As for the little Princess, she went back gay and smiling, to her own beautiful country, and passed the rest of her life in distributing its riches amongst the poor and unfortunate. From that day every one has followed her example ; and the hearts of all have enjoyed unsailing happiness through the medium of CHARITY.

THE WONDERFUL TRUMPET.

A STORY OF FINLAND.

IN days long ago there lived a King named DINUBE, whose power extended over all the provinces of Bothnia. He was the father of three daughters, of whom he was extremely fond. The first was called Helen ; the second Diva ; and the third Sophia. Being anxious to learn the destiny of his three girls, the King convoked an assembly of fortune-tellers, who came together in large numbers from all parts of his empire ; and, after going through all the various rites of their sorcery, announced, that, for the next twenty years, it would be desirable to keep the Princesses very carefully shut up, if it were wished not to expose them to a very great danger.

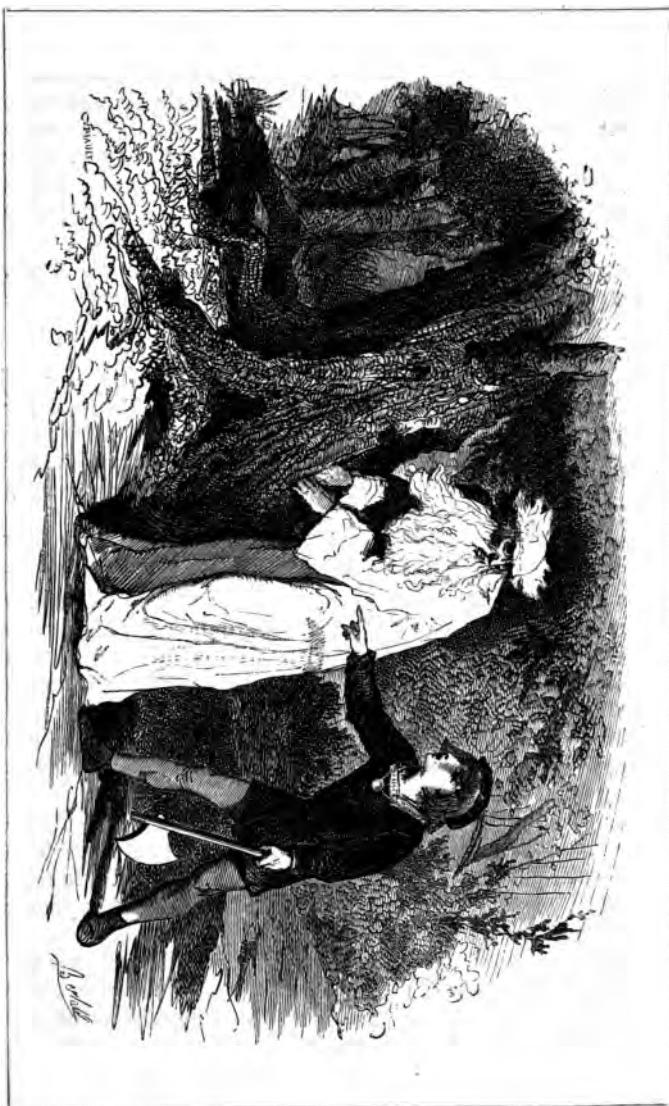
King Dinube, a sovereign much accustomed to have his own way, for he had been some years a widower, ordered these young Princesses to be placed at once under guard of some faithful servants within the walls of his palace ; and he caused to be constructed in his garden a spacious building entirely of glass, in which they could play and walk about in perfect safety. Thus they grew up, and became very beautiful. But, the more they grew, the stronger they felt awakening within them a desire to breathe the fresh air. The constraint they were under

made them sad ; and, by degrees, it became the general remark, that they were growing pale. At last, the kind old King, troubled at their evident suffering, said to himself,—“ My darling daughters are no longer children. The youngest of them is now fifteen years of age. It is useless to keep them in captivity any longer.” That day, therefore, he gave them leave to go out; but not all at once, without having them accompanied by numbers of his officers ; and, what is more, by the warden of his castle, named Koljoumi, a man of unequalled stature and strength.

The young ladies started off through the gates of the palace, with childish glee. The sight of the fields, the hills, the rivers, threw them into ecstasies. In their lively eagerness, they took it into their heads to climb a cliff, covered with lovely green moss and spotted with flowers, when, all of a sudden, the rock opened, and swallowed them up ! The giant, Koljoumi, threw himself on the rock, broke it with a blow from his powerful fist, and was about to seize the princesses, when a sword of fire sprang forth, and struck him, and he fell dead.

The officers returned to the palace, and announced the dreadful tidings to King Dinube, a task by no means enviable, from the strong nature of his emotions. Great was the desolation of the royal household, and great the mourning. The poor father, after ordering the execution of all the officers, who had gone out with his daughters, and not brought them back again, was so overpowered by his feelings, that he fell into a gloomy sadness, and, thenceforth, all the world was indifferent to him.

Now, His Majesty had at his court three men who pretended to a knowledge of all the mysteries in the world. These very wise and knowing persons were called the HEIMDALLER. They offered the King to go in search of his daughters ; and His Majesty gave them permission to take with them as many of his servants as they thought they wanted. Now, amongst many noble and brave young gentlemen who were most anxious to share in this expedition was a young Page of the court, named Gulpho, but the Heimdaller declined his company, and departed in the



full conviction that nothing could prevent the successful result of their enterprise. After wandering about, however, for a long time, on every coast, without discerning anything, and when the provisions for their voyage were almost exhausted, they came back to Hisisburg, for so the King's castle was called. When, some days after, they were about to start on an expedition, Gulpho again asked their permission to accompany them; but the Heimdaller treated him as a presumptuous boy.

Poor Gulpho went off very sad, to walk in the forest, and as a means of getting rid of his vexation, betook himself to trying the strength of his arms, by striking his hatchet into the trunk of a large oak.

Suddenly, he saw appear near him, an old man of colossal stature, who watched his proceedings with an air of raillery, and said to him, "Poor boy, is this the way you pretend to strike down these huge trees? Give me your axe, and I will show you the way to use such a tool."

Gulpho saw directly that this old man must be one of the Genii of the forest; but he could not tell whether he was the bad Genius Ahtolisnen, or the good Genius Pellerwoin. He reflected for a moment as to how he ought to act, then drove his hatchet with all his might into the trunk of the oak, and pretended he was not able to draw it out again.

"Kind old gentleman," said he; "will you oblige me by putting your hands in this cleft, so as to enlarge it, that I may be able to withdraw my axe from it?"

The Genius confidently did as he was asked, and at the same instant, the dexterous Gulpho drew out his axe. The fingers of the old man were caught in the cleft of the oak. He tried vainly to release them, and begged the young esquire to come to his assistance.

Gulpho replied to him quietly; "You will not recover the use of your hands, until you point out to me the place where the three young Princesses, the daughters of my King, are shut up."

"If that be the case," answered the Genius, "I will tell you."

"Take a bull by the horns, and a man at his word;" added the saucy Page.

Then the Genius went on to say, "The Princesses are hidden in the hollows of the rocks of King Kammo. The youngest of them is down a hundred feet deep, in the chamber of iron, with a crown of iron upon her head, and a ring of iron on her finger. The second, is a hundred feet lower, in the chamber of silver; with a crown of silver on her head, and a ring of silver on her finger. The third is in the chamber of gold, with a crown of gold upon her head, and a ring of gold upon her finger."

"I am much obliged to you for the information," went on Gulpho; "but the question is, how am I to get the princesses out of all these places?"

"O," answered the old man, "that will not be at all a hard task. I will give you the means to do so, if you will take my hands out of this fix, as sure as I am the Genius Pellerwoin."

The young Page, made happy by hearing the old man was the good Genius Pellerwoin, set him loose immediately, by driving his axe once more into the oak.

Hereupon, Pellerwoin gave him a rope a hundred fathoms in length, a sword, a vial of magic water, and a trumpet, with these words; "With this cord you must go down into the caves of the rock, and as soon as the full moon shall shine on the mountain, sound this trumpet, and I will be quickly near you."

The young Page went back, full of hope, to Hisisburg, where he awaited the return of the Heimdaller. But these wise and knowing gentlemen had not discovered any more this time, although they had plenty to tell of the strange things they had seen in the far-off countries they had travelled over, and the dangers of all kinds they had confronted. All these stories, however, brought no consolation to the poor old King, who never ceased weeping for his three pretty daughters; and had now lost all hope of setting his eyes upon them again.

Now, perceiving his royal master to be in such deep distress, Gulpho, who was a brave lad and a loyal subject, felt greatly grieved; so stepping forward respectfully, in

front of the King's throne, he bowed with great humility, and asked the royal permission to undertake, in his turn, a search after the Princesses; telling his majesty that he had some very good notions on the subject, with the addition, that he required no assistance from the Heimdaller, who might stop at home. The King replied to him, in a sad tone; "I make no count of your prowess, my good young man, since the cleverest men in my empire have been checkmated in the same enterprise. But, go, since such is your desire."

On the first day of the full moon, the courageous Page set forth on his way, taking with him all the Genius had given him for that purpose. No sooner had he reached the forest, than he sounded the trumpet, and Pellerwoin appeared.

"Are you quite ready?" said he.

"Quite;" replied Gulpho, with an undaunted air.

"All right! follow me;" said the Genius.

Now it happened that the Heimdaller, struck with the tone of confidence in which Gulpho had announced his design to the King, set a spy upon him, and followed him thither to rob him of it.

Pellerwoin stopped in front of a mass of rocks, and pointing out to the young Page a deep crevice; "It is here," said he; "you must go down, but I will accompany you."

"Very well," replied Gulpho.

And the two went down. At the depth of a hundred feet, they were stopped by a door of iron.

"Draw your sword," said the Genius, "and strike upon the door."

Gulpho obeyed, and the door fell to pieces.

Whereupon they entered the chamber of iron, in which the Princess Helen was seated, with the crown of iron, and the ring of iron. A frightful Kobolde (that is to say one of those earth-demons that are so terrible to miners and all who work under ground) with a horn on his head, and an eye in the middle of his forehead, was guarding her.

"Ho! ho!" he cried, "I smell the flesh of a man."

"Make yourself easy," replied Helen, "it is only a



crow flying over the top of the mountain, holding in its beak a morsel of meat."

Now as the Kobolde was old, and his eye-sight very weak, he had not seen the entrance of the Page, and believed what the princess told him. But there was a large fire burning on the hearth, and near it an iron stake, which the Kobolde used as a poker. Gulpho caught up this poker, made it red hot, and plunged it into the eye of the wicked warden, whose head he next cut off.

"Extremely well done," said the Genius; "at present the princess is delivered; leave her crown here; break her ring in two, and take care of the half of it."

Next, they both went down, with Helena, a hundred feet deeper, until they came to a door of silver, which Gulpho broke to pieces in the same way as the first. He set at liberty, in like wise the second princess, then the third, breaking each of their rings, as the Genius had recommended him, and taking care of the halves. The three sisters embraced each other with inexpressible joy; but the kind Pellerwoin hastened to make them go out of the cave where they had been so long held captive.

But the Heimdaller were waiting at the entrance of the crevice, and as soon as they saw the Princesses appear, they cut the cord, by which Gulpho was suspended, and the unhappy young gentleman fell senseless, to the bottom of the abyss.

The good Pellerwoin fled in terror.

Then these perfidious, these barbarous Heimdaller, drew near to the three sisters, and forced from them a promise, under a solemn and terrible oath, to declare to their father, that they, the Heimdaller, were their deliverers. After which, they conducted them to the castle.

The King was the happiest man in all the world, nor could he tell how sufficiently to shew his gratitude to the Heimdaller.

Poor Gulpho's name was never mentioned. The Princesses, alone, gave a thought to their murdered preserver, but they could not violate their oaths.

Meanwhile, this is what came to pass. After remaining in a fainting fit, Gulpho raised himself up, felt all his

limbs over, and found, to his great joy, that in so terrible a fall he had not broken any bones. All he felt from it was an extreme weakness. Suddenly he called to mind the vial of magic water that Pellerwoin had given him, and found it uninjured. He drank a portion of it, and at once revived. Next came the difficulty of getting out of this abyss, where no human aid could be looked for. As he wandered from one side to the other to find some exit, he put his hand by chance on the trumpet, and, for amusement, sounded a few notes. At the moment, the good Genius appeared to him.

"What makes you so dull?" said he

"I have reason to be sad," answered the Page; "I have saved the princesses, and here I am, without any means of getting out, at the bottom of this abyss."

"I think I see a crow up there, skimming about," replied Pellerwoin, "perhaps he may be able to carry you out of the cavern?"

"It is quite possible," replied Gulpho, "I have grown so thin!"

The Genius called the crow down to them; the Page placed himself across its wings, and a few moments afterwards was out of the abyss, in which he had thought he was going to perish. But, though for the present, escaped from so great a danger, what was he to do next? To go back to the palace was not wise, as he would be sure to run against the Heimdaller there, and where else would he betake himself, for he was an orphan, and had not a friend in the whole world.

"Forward's the word," said he; "we must go on, anyhow, and leave the rest to God."

So he turned his steps towards the residence of the King; but the nearer he approached, the more his heart misgave him, and he thought he would look about him for a while first, and watch how things were going on. He entered himself, therefore, at a Blacksmith's, as an apprentice, by way of filling up his time.

Now, it happened one day that his master, who was a clever workman, was sent for to Hisisburg. The young princess desired a crown of iron, such as she used to wear

when in prison, and the Blacksmith, who had never seen a crown of such a kind, was much puzzled how to make one like it. Nevertheless, he went to work at it, for such



were the King's orders. After a patient trial, he succeeded in making a capital crown; but it was not at all what Helen wanted, and he returned home, much vexed at his ill success.

When Gulpho learnt the cause of his master's vexation, "Perhaps," said he to him, "I may be able to make this crown." And that evening, as soon as the Blacksmith went to sleep, he sounded his trumpet. Pellerwoin came quickly.



"What do you wish for now?" asked the good Genius.
"A crown of iron, such as the Princess Helen used to wear when in the rock."
"Thou shalt have it."

The Genius went and fetched the one they had left behind in the subterranean cavern. Gulpho placed it on a bench. His master, on awaking, stared at it with joyful surprise. "Ah," said he, to his apprentice, "I know not how you have become such a skilful workman, but since you have made this beautiful article, you ought to be the bearer of it yourself to the princess."

"No," answered Gulpho; "it is not becoming for the apprentice to play the part of the master. Go you to the palace with this crown, and say, if you wish it, that it is the work of your pupil."

The Blacksmith went to the castle. The Princess was delighted; and the King recompensed the ingenious artisan with great generosity.

The next day Helen's second sister wanted a crown of silver made. A second time the Blacksmith was sent for to the palace; tried a second time to execute the order; and a second time, failed. And once more, Gulpho, in the morning, handed over to him the precious diadem.

"Oh," exclaimed the eldest of the Princesses, when she saw the man arrive with his treasure, "this pupil of yours is assuredly a man of marvellous talent. If he can make me a crown of gold like that I used to wear in my rocky prison, he shall be my husband, and have the half of my kingdom."

"Now, then, to work," exclaimed the Blacksmith, as he re-entered his workshop; "go to your anvil, and take up your hammer, and make a crown of gold, my lad; and thou shalt be a king's son-in-law." As he said these words, he set himself to watch Gulpho, for the purpose of seeing by what mysterious art he would accomplish the task. But the young Page, who guessed his intention, waited for the hour when his master could no longer withstand his drowsiness; and as soon as he saw him in a deep sleep, summoned Pellerwoin, and made him bring the crown of gold.

Next day, the Blacksmith, seeing this splendid work sparkling in his forge, said to Gulpho, "this time I will not take thy place. It is thou who art the master, beyond all compare; as for me, I am not worthy to be thy apprentice. Go, then, thyself to the castle."

"So be it," replied Gulpho.

He took the crown and set out on his way. But at some distance from the forge, he sounded his trumpet, and prayed Pellerwoin to procure him a handsome carriage.

This was done as soon as said. A superb equipage came out from the forest, drawn by four prancing grey horses, caparisoned in red housings, mounted with silver.

Gulpho got into the carriage and drove towards the castle. The Heimdaller were waiting in the passage, resolved to slay that strange apprentice, whom the Princess had promised to marry, and rob him of the crown. But when they saw this handsome young gentleman in his royal carriage, they did not recognise the apprentice, but bowed respectfully to him, as some royal visitor or ambassador.

Gulpho entered the court-yard of the palace, was shown to the King's apartments, and presented his crown; when the Princess, who was reading some papers to her father, cast her eyes upon the Page, she uttered a scream of joy; while all the courtiers crowded round to pay their compliments to the fortunate artisan.

Then Gulpho, taking from a purse, which he kept in his bosom, one half of the ring of iron, advanced towards Helena, and said to her, "Is not this a portion of your ring?" The two halves of the circle, when brought together, fitted exactly. He presented, in like manner, two halves of the ring of silver and the ring of gold, to the other two sisters. Finally, the Princesses declared that he was the man who had set them free, and the Princess Sophia married him. Their nuptials were celebrated by fetes of extraordinary grandeur.

The Heimdaller were punished, as they deserved; and the King, in commemoration of these events, caused the three crowns to be emblazoned on his escutcheon—where, to this day, they continue to form the armorial bearings of that country.

SUPERLATIVE.

A LONG time ago, and in a distant part of the country, there lived a worthy couple, who had been married fifteen years without having any children. At the end of this time, they determined, as a last hope, to implore heaven, to grant, in recompense of such patient waiting, a son endowed with some wonderful gift which should distinguish him from all other men ; their prayers were granted ; they had a son, who came into the world so strong and so beautiful, that they called him Superlative, thinking that no other name would so well suit the immense size, and unusual strength of the new-born infant.

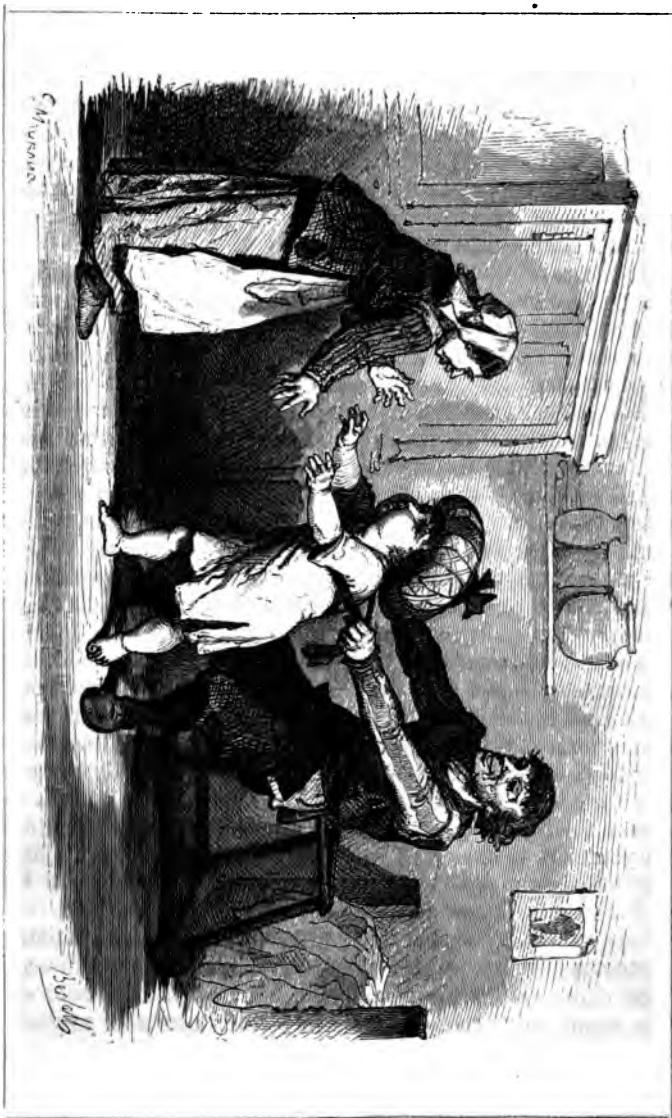
Now this name might have been very ill-chosen ; for it often happens, that children who are born very large and strong do not afterwards grow up so, and fine names come to be a mistake, and a very silly mistake too.

This, however, was not the case with Superlative. He far exceeded all the wishes of his parents, and grew still taller and stronger than any children of his age.

At twelve years old, he was as big as a man, and had almost the appearance of one.

He always measured his height by comparing himself with the finest amongst the soldiers who passed him in the streets, and you may be sure treated his little companions with a thousand disdainful airs, and let slip very few chances of mocking their inferiority to himself.

He might have entered the first company of the King's guard when he was fifteen years old, and so have held a



place very near the royal person. At twenty he was a real giant, and was wider across the shoulders than any other man in the kingdom.

As he had grown in proportion, increasing altogether both in height and breadth, his whole body was perfectly regular, and a model of size and strength: the expression of his face, too, was both noble and gentle; even the most jealous people could only find too much self-conceit in his appearance.

It is certain that whatever might be the appearance of his face, pride was in his heart; and, as Superlative had only to show himself in any public place to obtain the notice of every one present, he soon began to think himself a wonder of perfection.

Besides this, the crowd were always too ready to praise him as much as he could desire, and seemed never tired of flattering his splendid figure; compliments which he heard as though they were his right, and received with a grand manner.

All his talk was of Giants, Titans, and Cyclops. When he mentioned Samson, or Polyphemus, he always added, "and the rest of us," to make believe that he thought himself something above common men.

He was not always respectful to his mother; indeed, he almost treated her like a little girl. When she walked out with him, he used to offer her his hand, for she was not tall enough to take hold of his arm.

"My son," said she once, "enjoy these great advantages of yours with modesty, and be less proud, or you have reason to fear the punishment which heaven will inflict on you. It is true that you are the greatest of men; but remember that God is greater than you."

This advice produced no effect on Lord Superlative. Remarks which came from so inferior a person as his little mother were not worth his attention; not they, indeed. Was it not rather his place to direct her, and to scold all the mean silly creatures who had not been able to grow beyond the common height.

To make more of his great towering size, he liked to go about in the company of little insignificant-looking men. If

he could have found dwarfs, he would have liked them all the better ; and it was a strange thing, that these mean-looking friends of his were glad to go out with him, imagining that being seen with such a very big man, they would look taller themselves, while, in truth, the contrast between them and Superlative only made them look more ridiculous, and nearly kept them out of sight.

On the contrary, the tall, broad-chested fellows, were jealous of him ; so much so that when the Prince desired him to enter his guard, all the other members of it declared to his Majesty, that if Superlative were enrolled they should demand their discharge. So he remained in his solitary haughty grandeur, like one of those immense oak trees which grow alone in the plain, while the trees of the neighbouring forest are pressing one against another, and looking with envy at the superb giant whom they cannot rival.

One morning, Superlative took himself off to a village, where they were about to hold a fair ; for he liked to be placed in the midst of a crowd, where he could receive on all sides, as he went along, the homage of the simple country folks, and the flattering remarks of the common people.

In a place of this sort he always became the principal show ; and this never failed to give him the greatest pleasure, since it gratified his vanity and his ambition. It must be admitted, that Superlative knew how to dress himself to great advantage : he had made for him a fantastic suit of clothes, which was half military and half that of a citizen : he wore large loose boots which came to his knee ; with great high heels and spurs half a foot long ; over his shoulders he threw a cloak, or rather a short mantle, which was not large enough to hide his fine figure, but rather seemed to increase the width of his back ; his head dress was shaped like a Persian cap, and was often ornamented, either with a splendid plume or with a single feather, which compelled him to stoop his head under the highest doorways ; and even under the ropes upon which the street lamps were hung ; stretching from house to house at the first floor windows.

To reach the fair he had to go through a wood, and was just coming out into the open road, when he saw before him a brook which was both wide and deep; this to him was only a trifle which he could cross at a long step, and he had just lifted his foot, when he perceived, standing near him, a little old woman in a cloak and hood.

She said to him, in a trembling voice, "My good gentleman, pray help me to get across the water."

"And where are you going when you get to the other side, my pretty little maid," said Superlative. "Perhaps you are going to dance at the fair?"

"I am not pretty," replied the little old woman; "I am old and infirm; so you cannot call me a little maid."

"Excuse me, my dear madam," replied Superlative, in a mocking tone, and making her a low bow: "I cannot, at this height, see whether you are young or old, and you are too far off for me to know if you are ugly or pretty; but tell me why you want to cross the brook."

"That I may go to the fair to see the greatest fool, and the vainest animal in the world," said she; "for I know he is to be there."

"Who is this great fool, then, this vain animal?"

"It is yourself, Superlative!" said the little old woman, her eyes sparkling with anger.

Superlative went up to her, and would have thrown her rudely over to the other side of the stream; but when he was about to seize her by the shoulders, he found that his arms became as stiff as though they had been turned to stone; they hung down by his sides, and he could not move them.

"Since you are cruel as well as proud, you shall be punished, Superlative," said the Fairy, for she was, indeed, a Fairy in disguise. "Listen to me! if your wit is equal to your size, you will understand my warning.

"One sun eats twelve full moons,
Before his work is done;
But now each moon shall eat
The whole work of a sun."

SUPERLATIVE.

After repeating these words, the little old woman tripped across the brook as cleverly as a kitten could have done;



and laughing at Superlative, desired him, in a mocking tone, to be sure and come to the fair.

He had recovered the use of his limbs, but only profited by it to make the best of his way home; for he began to feel stealing over him a dread of some shocking disgrace.

He went away, saying over and over again to himself the Fairy's strange words:—

“One sun eats twelve full moons
Before his work is done,
But now each moon shall eat,
The whole work of a sun.”

He could not, at first, understand the meaning of this threat; and it took him thirty days to guess the answer to the riddle. At last, however, he began to comprehend it, and immediately flew into a violent passion.

A week after he had met the little old woman at the brook, he felt his clothes getting too loose for him; and very soon, his boots seemed a great deal larger than they used to be. “The threats of that wicked old woman have made me fret, and I am growing thin;” said he to himself.

As he was frequently muttering the fairy's words as he went about the house, part of them had been overheard by his father and mother; and although they could not understand them, they became very uneasy while they watched his unhappiness.

“My dear Superlative,” said his little mother one day; “you are unhappy because of some miserable secret;—perhaps you are in love? I hope it may be so. And I pray that you may find a woman worthy of you.”

“Don't talk to me of women, mother!” he replied angrily; “and pray Heaven that the moon may not eat the sun.”

“You do nothing but talk about the moon, my dear Superlative. Leave the sun and the moon where they are, and make up your mind to enjoy yourself upon the earth, where those other two planets look down upon nothing more beautiful than you.”

On the last day of the month, Superlative, who was alone in his bed-room, could not help noticing, that besides being a great deal thinner and smaller round the body, he had become very much shorter. He had been

afraid that this change was coming on him ; but on this fatal day he was quite sure of it. "Father!" he shouted, in his usual haughty tone.

"What do you want, my son?" asked his father, as he ran, followed by the mother.

"Pray take the two-foot rule, and put it to the top of my head, while I stand against the wall ;" said he.

In this room, there was a part of the wall, where his happy parents had marked his growth every year up to the age of twenty ; there was a line drawn, to show the height to which his head reached each time he had been measured, and opposite this line was written his age when the measurement was made.

His father, having jumped on to a chair, placed the two-foot rule on his son's head, and after looking for a moment, to make sure, said ; "It is very singular ! The rule shows a lower place on the wall than the mark we made when you were twenty years old. And yet it can't be at twenty-four years old that we begin to grow downwards."

"There, we've had quite enough remarks !" said Superlative brutally. "Tell me quickly, with which measure my height corresponds to-day."

"Exactly with that of your nineteenth year, my son."

"Confusion !" groaned Superlative ; "one moon has, indeed, eaten the work of a sun."

"What is it you are saying, my dear ?" said his mother, trembling.

"I say, that I have lost, in one month, the growth of a whole year," replied he ; "and that is how the words of the old woman are explained."

It now became necessary for Superlative to relate to his parents, his adventure with the little old woman ; and they, like himself, could foresee, that nothing but misfortune was likely to come of it.

Up to this time, the people in the town had seen nothing of the change in Superlative. It is true, that he had not not been so much out of doors, and his absence had, of course, been remarked ; but the world, at present, did not know of his disgrace. At last, fearing that his diminished size might excite the attention of his acquaintances, he sent

for his bootmaker, and told him to make the heels of his boots a little higher, desiring him, in the strongest manner, not to say anything about it; which scarcely showed him



to be very clever, for, of course, Mr. Bootmaker, seeing that there was a secret somewhere, could not rest, till he

had repeated Superlative's order to twenty different people, and told them how he had asked him to keep that order to himself.

This gossip soon had some effect.

"He doesn't look so very big, after all ;" said one of the fashionable men of the neighbourhood.

"On the contrary," said another, "in spite of the heels, which would do for little stilts, the giant seems to me much less superb than he used to be."

This last remark was only too true; for Superlative was every day convinced that he was growing smaller and smaller.

"Father," he said, at last; "give me your blessing, and some money, I pray you! I cannot bear to stay in this city; I wish to travel, and that may give the change which I so much need."

"Yes; and a little appetite," said his mother, "to restore your good looks, and bring back the flesh which you have been fretting off your bones for the last few weeks. Go, my son; and return as you were before that fatal meeting."

Having arrived in a city where he had never been before, but where his renown had been spread abroad, Superlative did not fail to excite general admiration.

It was a return to the happy days, when the crowd followed him through the streets, to admire and praise him. The most beautiful ladies turned round to look after him, when he passed, and held back their heads, that they might look up at him. The finest men stopped when they saw him, and often talked about him, amongst themselves, at the street corners, astonished at his appearance. But, alas! a secret grief poisoned all this triumph; he was like a rich man who has suddenly become poor, and who, knowing that he will soon have no more to spend, hears people speaking of his great wealth. He felt that he was decreasing daily, and could no longer hide from himself the hopeless certainty of that incurable decay.

At the end of the second month, *another moon had eaten the work of a sun.* Superlative was no bigger then than he was when he was sixteen years old. For this reason, he made up his mind to move to a town still further off, where

he still excited some astonishment; but he had the pain of hearing a gentleman say to a beautiful lady,—“From what I had heard of his fame, I should have thought he would have been taller.”

He used all the means in his power to add to his size; such as having his coats padded thickly on the chest and shoulders, while, rather than appear less in height, he began (O how uncomfortable!) to walk on tip-toe. In every city he visited, he was obliged to call in a tailor to alter the seams of his coats, and to make tucks in his trousers. His parents had desired him to let them know how he fared; but he was so ill-tempered and unhappy, that he could not summon courage to write to them. Here is a letter that he sent to his mother, and it will show how miserable he had become.

“ My dear Mother,

“ Every day brings new trouble, and proves to me, that the malicious fairy will not cease to pursue me, till she has made me the most wretched shrimp in the world. Behold me, now reduced, I believe, to my height of sixteen years! Another month like the last, and I shall be no bigger than a common man; while, in time, I may expect to become one of the pygmies, and to find myself as small a dwarf, as I was once a magnificent giant. Where will this horrible decrease end. I almost wish that it might come quicker, and end by reducing me to nothing.

“ I am tired of life How I shall be ridiculed when my deplorable history is known. I can never dare to show myself in my native village! I shall soon be compelled to hide myself even from the eyes of strangers. And you, poor mother, will you still consent to acknowledge me when I dare no longer to acknowledge myself? I do not know when I can come home again; the smaller I get, the less desire I have to return. Do prepare our neighbours for my altered appearance? Say that a dreadful secret consumes me. The only thing I dare hope for is, that they may pity me; but I fear I have too often laughed at others, and have given them little cause to be kind to me now.

“ I embrace you, my good mother, and am your humiliated, lonely, diminished son—diminished in everything except the affection he has for you.”

His poor mother comforted him as well as she could ; begging him to forget the past and to hope for the future. She took care not to reproach him now it was too late ; and never said, " I told you so ;" or, " Ah, just what I expected ;" as many people delight in saying to their unfortunate friends. Indeed, she soon found out that no reproofs were needed, as her son was now sorry for the follies of his past life. He had deeply blamed himself for his own pride, since he wished for others to pity him ; so she insisted that he should return as quickly as possible to his native town. And as his journey had done him no good —at least had done his health no good—it would be better for him to show himself again before he had changed still more.

She contrived, then, to prepare all the friends and neighbours, for seeing the difference in her son's appearance.

While Superlative was considering what he ought to do, he met with a very disagreeable adventure. He was in a close carriage — not because he liked this mode of travelling, but because he wished to conceal his diminished figure — when he saw coming towards him, mounted on their prancing horses, two of the tallest men of the royal guard.

They had heard talk of the curious change in the person of Superlative : and, that they might prove the truth of this report, and at the same time gratify themselves by insulting their old rival, maliciously drew their horses across the road and stopped him. What a distressing meeting ! It was the first time he had ever seen men as tall as himself. One of the guards, who noticed his annoyance, chose to make it worse by his pretended compliments.

" Our service to Lord Superlative," said he, with an air of mock respect ; " what event has caused you to leave your native city, which you have made famous to the whole world by your extraordinary greatness ; truly, when one remains long without seeing you, your presence gives them a new surprise. I really believe, upon my honour, that you are growing now. We were speaking of you

only a minute ago, Lord Superlative ; and I made a wager with my comrade, that if you were on foot, you would reach above his head, while he sits upon his horse ; may we be permitted, my lord, to ask you to make the experiment ?”

“ I am in great haste to reach the end of my journey,” answered Superlative, rather rudely.

“ A very pretty excuse,” cried the other guard ; “ for my part, I always said Lord Superlative was more in appearance than in reality ; and now that I look at him more closely, I warrant he is no taller than I am.”

“ I should wish to be even much less,” replied he, trying to escape their banter ; “ rather than I should bear this ; any one would do me a service to reduce me to the size of a dwarf.”

“ Ah, I see,” sneered the other ; “ you are preparing yourself for what is to come ; for if I understand certain rumours, your wish will be accomplished before long.”

After this, they set spurs to their horses, and allowed Superlative to go on his journey.

“ Well,” said he to himself, “ this is a specimen of the beautiful things I shall hear when I return to my native town. Cruel Fairy, what a terrible punishment you have inflicted on me for a moment of forgetfulness.”

Superlative would have fled to the end of the world rather than have gone home ; but his money was nearly all spent, and his father, who seemed not to feel the same affection for him as in the days of his fame, declared he would not send him another penny.

“ If you are really to become as little as you once were big,” wrote he ; “ I cannot safely allow you to run about the world ; before long you will, perhaps, want a father’s protection ; do not wait till strangers think you are a child, and amuse themselves at your expense.”

O what bitter words for the proud Superlative ; and yet he could not help knowing that they were wise. He yielded, and once more travelled towards home. It was night when he entered his parents’ house ; but he sighed when he saw the high doorway which had been made for his use. Alas ! an ordinary door was high enough, now ; he was no taller than a simple grenadier.

At the sight of his mother he was much affected ; and he clasped her so tenderly in his arms, that she, too, shed many tears : such a thing as gentleness from her son, had never happened to her before. The poor woman could not help showing her grief and surprise ; and the father looked sadly distressed. He had so often let everybody see his pride when his son was admired by the world, that he felt, like him, deeply disgraced, and feared the same ridicule.

"These are the fruits of your foolish conduct," grumbled he.

"Hold your tongue, husband," said the mother ; "is this the way to receive our child, and will you love him less because he is more like yourself. Such as he is now, any other father would be proud of him."

"Let him stop at this point, and I will forgive him," replied the husband, still in an ill temper.

Superlative did not reply, but asked leave to go to rest ; and he noticed, lovingly, that his mother had altered the furniture to suit his present size, and had also shortened his bed.

"Soon, perhaps," said he, before he went to sleep, "even this will be too long for me."

The return of Superlative excited general curiosity ; every one wanted to see him ; but he stayed at home and hid himself from all eyes. Some days afterwards, the whole town was in deep mourning ; for the Queen had died, leaving the King in great sorrow ; and all the people were expected to attend the royal funeral.

Superlative's father, who held a situation at court, could not excuse himself from being present ; and his son was expected to go with him.

There was no one there whose sad appearance was better suited to a funeral than that of the unfortunate Superlative. He walked with his eyes cast down, and with a grievous air ; any one, who did not know of his troubles, might have said, "This is the man who, next to the King, feels most regret for our late Queen."

The other assistants, on the contrary, were strangely careless of the ceremony which should have fixed their

attention on this mournful day ; they seemed to do nothing but stare at the poor fellow who had become such a wreck ; and they did not trouble themselves to hold back their grins and mocking speeches.

The King, plunged in deep grief, was, perhaps, the only person present who did not notice the odd appearance of the young man during the march of the procession to the tomb ; but when the mourners were placed around the grave, Superlative—who had prudently crept behind two tall beef-eaters, whose size would, alas, conceal him from all eyes—was all at once exhibited, because the beef-eaters were ordered to fall further back, at the very moment when His Majesty happened to turn round. Even at this solemn moment, the monarch could not help allowing his surprise to be seen ; he bent his head down in the attempt to conceal a smile which had begun to move the corners of his mouth, and which the more bold among his courtiers instantly observed. “Yes,” said they, when they were returning, “the King himself laughed before the coffin of his wife, at the sight of my Lord Superlative.”

As it was found that this name no longer became him, there was a proposal to give him another. “It’s my opinion,” said one, “to make the change quite complete, that we ought to prepare for calling him ‘Diminutive.’”

The people were, in short, persuaded that there was witchcraft in the matter ; and that the former giant was punished for his pride by some genii, who would not be likely to leave the work half done.

While all the world seemed to show a malicious joy at his misfortune, one person alone sincerely pitied Superlative. It was the good and beautiful Amelia.

And yet she would have had reason to be pleased, if she, too, had been revengeful ; for, whilst Superlative was in all his glory, she had dared to hope for his notice. Why should he thank her for her love ? She was such a poor little thing by the side of him, and yet she was in reality a majestic beauty, only at that time nothing would have suited Superlative but a gigantic one.

“If she were only a foot taller,” he had said to his mother one day.

But now he thought her perfectly lovely, and he was deeply touched by her goodness and compassion.

"If I could be sure," said he, "that my person would not change more than my affection, I would kneel at her feet, and ask her to pardon my former rudeness."

He was walking in a tangled wood, thinking of Amelia, when he suddenly met her, for she, too, was there, thinking of him.

"Charming Amelia," he said, tenderly, "you do not laugh at the sight of me, then, as all the others do?"

"I do not know how to laugh, Sir, at anything which afflicts you," she replied. "To me, you are all that could be wished."

Having in this way begun the conversation, they kept on walking side by side. They could not have been better matched. Superlative was only half-a-head taller than Amelia.

"This is the first time I have ever felt happy at losing my height, because I feel your hand close to mine," said he, as they went on hand in hand. "Lean upon my arm, and let me have a pleasure that I have never before known."

Amelia, quite overcome, placed her little hand on his arm, and seemed to wait for him to speak again. He told her all the love which he felt for her; but he had become truthful and sincere, and did not conceal his fears of the future; and finished by saying, that, before they were married, it would be necessary to find out whether the Fairy would cease her persecution of him.

"I have loved you for a long time," answered Amelia, gently; "and do not believe that true love should make us uneasy about what may come to pass in the future. When a woman gives her heart she does not stop to think whether her lover may become lame, or crooked, or one-eyed, or whether he may be disfigured by sickness. And, beside, who knows, perhaps my devoted affection for you will appease the Fairy, and then you will love me the more for it."

After this, there was nothing to wait for but the consent of Superlative's father and mother; for Amelia depended on herself, as she was an orphan, and her guardian was always ready to grant her wishes.

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The people were, in short, persuaded that there was witchcraft in the matter ; and that the former giant was punished for his pride by some genii, who would not be likely to leave the work half done.

While all the world seemed to show a malicious joy at his misfortune, one person alone sincerely pitied Superlative. It was the good and beautiful Amelia.

And yet she would have had reason to be pleased, if she, too, had been revengeful ; for, whilst Superlative was in all his glory, she had dared to hope for his notice. Why should he thank her for her love ? She was such a poor little thing by the side of him, and yet she was in reality a majestic beauty, only at that time nothing would have suited Superlative but a gigantic one.

“If she were only a foot taller,” he had said to his mother one day.

But now he thought her perfectly lovely, and he was deeply touched by her goodness and compassion.

"If I could be sure," said he, "that my person would not change more than my affection, I would kneel at her feet, and ask her to pardon my former rudeness."

He was walking in a tangled wood, thinking of Amelia, when he suddenly met her, for she, too, was there, thinking of him.

"Charming Amelia," he said, tenderly, "you do not laugh at the sight of me, then, as all the others do?"

"I do not know how to laugh, Sir, at anything which afflicts you," she replied. "To me, you are all that could be wished."

Having in this way begun the conversation, they kept on walking side by side. They could not have been better matched. Superlative was only half-a-head taller than Amelia.

"This is the first time I have ever felt happy at losing my height, because I feel your hand close to mine," said he, as they went on hand in hand. "Lean upon my arm, and let me have a pleasure that I have never before known."

Amelia, quite overcome, placed her little hand on his arm, and seemed to wait for him to speak again. He told her all the love which he felt for her; but he had become truthful and sincere, and did not conceal his fears of the future; and finished by saying, that, before they were married, it would be necessary to find out whether the Fairy would cease her persecution of him.

"I have loved you for a long time," answered Amelia, gently; "and do not believe that true love should make us uneasy about what may come to pass in the future. When a woman gives her heart she does not stop to think whether her lover may become lame, or crooked, or one-eyed, or whether he may be disfigured by sickness. And, beside, who knows, perhaps my devoted affection for you will appease the Fairy, and then you will love me the more for it."

After this, there was nothing to wait for but the consent of Superlative's father and mother; for Amelia depended on herself, as she was an orphan, and her guardian was always ready to grant her wishes.

You may be sure that the father and mother made no opposition.

"Marriage settles the position of a man," said the father; "it may, perhaps, settle the size of my son."

"Yes," added the mother, "the prayers of a wife may obtain for him what those of a mother never could secure."

The public made themselves very busy about this marriage, and most of them thought Amelia very silly to marry a man who was visibly becoming less every day. It was really a very dangerous undertaking. Amelia



might some day find she had nothing but a thinking atom for a husband.

She, however, full of confidence, dared to shew herself in the streets, on the arm of her affianced one, who was still a very fine man.

They were not long, though, in finding that the Fairy's charm could not be subdued by matrimony. The honey-

moon was as fatal to Superlative as any of the former moons ; and it had not passed, before he had undergone a very evident decrease in size. It was observed, too, that



in each new month, he was much smaller, in proportion, than in the month just passed, because growth, you know,

is much more rapid during the first years of childhood. So, the decay of the new husband would be more and more dreadful ; for, as each moon made the difference of a year in his size, he was coming nearer and nearer to the time of his infancy, and was soon to be only as big as when he was a baby.

His sadness increased as he became less ; it was no longer the rage of his first month, but a quiet melancholy. He saw Amelia looking always fresh and beautiful ; and, as we always think things large or small by comparing them with ourselves, she seemed to him to grow taller every day. He no longer wished to see any one but her and his mother, and shut himself up alone. Still Amelia knew how to cheer him sometimes. "My little husband," she would say, gaily, "I love you very much as you are ; unless you wish to please other women, why should you trouble yourself?"

After a time Amelia became sad too, and only looked at Superlative with tender pity. His height was now so little that he looked like a child, except that he had a beard, and that his face still wore its manly expression. Unhappily, he was not yet at the end of his trouble. Some time after Superlative, the magnificent Superlative, was nothing but a poor little dwarf, well-shaped in all his limbs, but so tiny that he was positively ridiculous. He was only three feet high.

"My Mother," said he one day, in his low silvery voice, "you had better get my cradle ready, for I shall soon want it."

"Patience, my son; let us hope that things will not go so far as that."

"As far as that, my Mother," was his reply, "I hope that they will go so far that there will be nothing left of me but a crumb. May the moment soon come when my poor soul may escape from the little body which the Fairy will have left me. I am too unhappy because I afflict two such faithful friends."

"Dear friend," said his wife (she no longer reminded him of his condition by calling him Superlative, and you will understand how kind and thoughtful this was). "Dear

friend, let us devote ourselves to your service; for this devotion delights women. If you can be happy as you are, we can be happy with you."

These generous feelings were like balm to the wounds of poor Superlative. Ah! if he had known what was said in the town, and how the good Amelia was wronged by the stupid people, it would have made him still more miserable. Wicked tongues talked about her everywhere.

"She doesn't dare to shew her husband, now," said one.

"She keeps him locked up for fear he should lose himself," said another.

"Yesterday she was frightened because he was nearly eaten by the cat; and you should have seen the trouble she had to get him out of her claws," said a third.

"Do you know, neighbour, that she talks of putting him out to nurse?"

"Well, it's enough to tire him out, poor little man, always shut up there."

"Well, that is funny, too; as if the house wasn't large enough for him: besides, don't you know that his wife carries him out for a walk sometimes; I can tell you there's no doubt of it, for she puts him in her pocket; but directly she gets into a safe place, where nobody can look at her, she lets him have a little exercise."

Amelia knew very well that she was not spared unkind words, because some of them came to her ears; but she was always gentle and sweet-tempered. She neglected nothing which would prevent her husband from feeling his humble lot. So she took care to order, from time to time, coats, trousers, and boots of a proper size for him; but the workpeople were never permitted to go in, to see if these garments fitted Superlative. They were led to suppose that he was asleep, or had gone out, or was ill.

At last it was rumoured abroad, that Superlative had become so very little that he would no longer shew himself either to his wife or mother.

It was said that he lived in a certain cupboard, where he had built up a sort of room adapted to his size.

He received the services of his dear Amelia without her seeing him. She came and sat down outside the cupboard,

while he looked at his loved one through the little window that he had made in the door. He felt his affection for her increase with his mean stature.

"Remember me in the past, dear Amelia," said he, sometimes; "and only think of Superlative as he appeared on the day of our happy marriage; forget what he is to-day. There may not now be a much longer time for him to live; for what remains of his person will soon be consumed; but his soul is not injured; on the contrary, it seems as though that soul were nearer heaven now, so little of earth is left him. Dear Amelia, it is after the moment of my real deliverance that I shall be able to return to you without shame or regret: I will watch over your beautiful head while you sleep. I will bring you the sweetest dreams, and will repay you, if I am able, for the long trials you have suffered during my sad life."

"I only ask of you one favour: take the preparations for my funeral under your own control; my poor mother will not be able to bear it. Lay out my poor little body upon a rosewood bier; and, finally, put my remains in a black marble urn; it will be small enough to hold in your hand, you can always keep it under your care; and when you die,—though may it be long before that happens!—have it placed in your coffin."

"You will engrave these words upon the marble:—

'Here lies dead, one who was beyond compare,
Of height majestic, and of beauty brave;
His pride provoking heaven's anger, there
Remained but to take back the gifts it gave.
A wife's pure love, a mother's tender care
Consoled him on the borders of the grave.'"

While grief of this new kind was afflicting the family of Superlative, public curiosity, always unpitying, wished to learn the mystery of it. Not only children, servants, sempstresses, footmen, and barbers,—people who are supposed to be naturally inquisitive and fond of gossip,—held the malicious desire of seeing Superlative, that they might amuse themselves at his expense: but people of very good fashion, and holding a higher position in the town, shared this wish. It must be said, that even His Ma-

jesty showed himself neither more wise nor more humane in the matter than the meanest of his subjects. "Nothing would be more easy than for your Majesty to



procure yourself this pleasure," said his courtiers ; "you have only to say the word, and the father of the little man must submit to your will." The learned men spoke much

in the same way. They remarked, how necessary it was to study such an extraordinary case; and how much science would gain by the discoveries they might make. "They would know how small a frame was required to contain all the parts of the human body necessary to sustain life; and, again, there might be drawn out some new ideas upon the wonderful connection of the soul and the body."

"One is easily persuaded to what one wishes," says the proverb. The King sent for the father of Superlative, ordering him to come to the palace; and then commanded him to produce his son. The poor man, who had been made morose by grief, answered in a tone which seemed disrespectful; and he was instantly arrested. The guards were ordered to his house; but when his wife and his daughter-in-law heard of their approach, they fastened the doors and windows, and prepared to maintain a sort of siege against the King's people.

"You violate the house of a Citizen," cried the wife from a garret-window; it cannot be, that you came on the part of His Majesty."

They could not longer doubt it, however, when the King, losing all respect for his own Royal dignity, advanced to see that his orders were executed.

The house was surrounded,—the doors burst open,—and the violent mob were soon standing before the cupboard, of which Amelia had the key; for they feared, that Superlative would try to escape by the key-hole.

Poor Superlative begged His Majesty, kindly to hear him for a moment, before the door was broken open.

The King, deigning to grant his request, the little man delivered the following address, in a voice like that of a starling, which excited the laughter of all the mocking assembly:—

"There was a time, Sire, when I was ambitious of the honour of guarding your sacred person. You yourself wished to grant me that favour; but the jealousy of my fellow-citizens would not permit it, and I was sacrificed.

"To-day, their spite is even still displayed against my person. They incite you to commit an unjust and violent action.

"I would submit, nevertheless, to give your Majesty what

must be called a very unworthy pleasure ; but I have a father, a mother, and a wife inconsolable for my misfortune. The grief that they feel pierces my soul, and makes me unable to bear the violence that is prepared for me. Sire, do not yield to a vain and cruel curiosity : but pray protect the weak one who implores you ; and do not add to his misfortune, by causing despair to those who claim his dearest affection."

At these words, Amelia threw herself at the feet of the King, who, joining hardness of heart to weakness and hypocrisy, answered, "that he would willingly leave Superlative at rest ; but that he could not refuse his faithful subjects a satisfaction which they had all demanded."

Then, without deigning longer to listen to the gentle wife of Superlative, he sent for a locksmith, and commanded that the cupboard should be broken open by force, since Amelia had obstinately refused to deliver up the key.

So great was the public curiosity, that in-doors the Lords of the Court and the great fat tradesmen of the city were squeezing each other for places ; the multitude surrounded the house, and fought for the front rank of the crowd, where they waited, with barbarous gaiety, till they should be admitted to walk, one by one, before the miserable object of their cruelty. Each one was secretly making up some silly joke, and promised himself the distinction of making everybody laugh.

At last, Mr. Locksmith elbowed his way through the crowd, ascended the stairs, and made his way before the grand officers of State, who envied him the happiness of being the first to see the Lord Superlative.

The King placed himself immediately behind the workman, that he might show his Royal prerogative by first appropriating this unfeeling amusement.

The locksmith attacked the lock, but it resisted his strength. He gave it a blow with a hammer.

The cupboard fell to pieces !

Oh, wonderful ! wonderful ! wonderful ! Instead of a dwarf, there appeared a tall and handsome man.

In one word, SUPERLATIVE !

Yes, Superlative, such as he had appeared in the wood to the eyes of the beautiful Amelia. He embraced his wife, his mother, and his father, and looked around him.

Oh, wonderful! wonderful! wonderful! The KING, the Locksmith, THE NOBLE LORDS, THE LEARNED MEN, the Guards, and, indeed, ALL THE PEOPLE, had become dwarfs on the spot.

Amidst cries, groans, curses, and wild uproar, all this confused crowd of pygmies fell, fought, rolled, and struggled at the feet of Superlative, who had never better deserved his name; and of Amelia, who could not without horror behold this sudden change. She pitied those who had shown no pity for her.

"What do we do here," said the father; "let us leave a country where we have no longer a place; let us live with men, and let us leave the pygmies to manage matters as well as they can amongst themselves."

FAIRYLIGHT.

THERE once lived an old shepherd and his wife, who had never had a child; they had long wished for one, but had no longer any hope that their wish would be fulfilled.

"It's a pity too," said the wife; "for I should have loved my little one so much."

"What would you have?" replied the husband. "Should we not resign ourselves to the will of God?" And he continued to lead his sheep to the pasture, while his wife stayed at home, spinning.

One evening he was bringing home his flock, when passing near a dried-up marsh, he saw coming out of the ground, almost under his feet, a "will-o'-the-wisp," which, in that part of the country, used to be called a "fairy-light."



This seemed to vanish amongst the long reeds, so he paid very little attention to it, but went on his way; his dog, however, ran after it, mistaking it for a butterfly, and jumped into the ditch in trying to catch the light.

The shepherd called and whistled to him, but he would not come back. "Come here, sir!" cried the old man, in an angry tone; but the dog only barked, and stayed hidden in the reeds.

His master, thinking he had started some game there, went to look for him; and then he saw a sight which took away his breath, and, at the same time, rejoiced his heart. It was a tiny little girl, with fair hair, beautiful rosy cheeks, with little white hands, and bare feet, smaller even than Cinderella's, and much prettier. She did not seem afraid of the great head of the dog, nor of his black bristling hair. She held in her hand a white water-lily, with which she caressed his nose; and as for him, he seemed so delighted to be noticed by her, that he let her do so, and looked at the child with pleased eyes, licking her little hands, and sniffing at her, almost as though he was laughing, with his fat nose, which had about it an air of intelligence and good humour quite amusing to see.

"Come," said the shepherd, as he tried to pass him; "will you get out of the way, you fat old fellow? do you think this charming little creature was put here for you?" At the same time, he stooped towards the child, who held out her arms to him.

"She's as pretty as heart can wish," cried he. "Who art thou, my little one? Who has put thee there? Who is thy mother? Come, tell me?"

It was vain for him to ask her any more; for the child had not yet learned to speak, and could only answer him by a smile. Then he took her in his arms and carried her home.

"Look here, wife!" said he, as he went in; "here is a child which God has sent us."

The good woman was delighted; she fed the little girl, took care of her, and loved her like a mother; and who knows how much a mother can love?

It was a poor household—so poor that they had scarcely

enough food for themselves—but yet the child wanted for nothing. They named her Fairylight, after the will-o'-the-wisp, which had led to her discovery.

She lived in this way till she was six years old, with the shepherd, whom she called Daddy Lambkin, and his wife, to whom she gave the name of Mammy Lamb'swool. Father Lambkin was as gentle as his surname; Mammy Lamb's-wool was as good as bread and honey; and Fairylight was as active as a squirrel, and as lovely as a little angel. So that in the humble cottage everybody was happy; but this happiness was not to last long.

Daddy Lambkin died, and left his widow and Fairylight in the deepest misery. The poor woman was old, and could do nothing but spin, by which she could not earn enough to buy food for two people. Then Fairylight turned shepherdess, that she might help her mother to live. She had often gone out with the old shepherd, and while he watched over his flocks, she ran about in the woods, where she gathered flowers, played with the butterflies, and whistled to the birds, whose warbling she imitated very cleverly, and who knew her so well that they would come hopping round her.

Even the beasts became tame with Fairylight; and squirrels, hares and foxes, had grown quite familiar with her; so that she was more pleased amidst these animals than among the villagers, who called her "the child of the ditch," to abuse her. Poor child, she had but two friends in the world, the shepherd's widow, and a lamb that she had found on the borders of the forest, which she brought up and took care of, because no one had owned it.

"We are brother and sister," she said to it. "I have found you as I was found; and I will love you as I am loved."

So Fairylight had very little trouble to become a shepherdess. She loved the fields, the sunny hills, and the thick green woods, and would willingly have passed her life there. Thanks to the few pence, and the morsels of bread which were given to her for taking care of the sheep, the little household went on peacefully; and Fairylight would have been happy, but for the unjust hatred of which she was the object.

There was one man who hated her more than all the rest of them. This was a Lord who lived in a neighbouring castle, and was so wicked and cruel, that he was the terror of the villagers. He detested Fairylight; detested her because she was so pretty and good, while he had a daughter of the same age, who was both ugly and wicked. He passed his whole time in hunting, and every time he and his pack of hounds passed Fairylight, he made his dogs run after the poor little girl's sheep.

It happened one day, that this Lord had wounded a roebuck, and followed him for two hours, when his dogs, which had followed the track of the animal barking furiously, became silent all at once. He shouted to them, but they still remained quiet; and surprised and disappointed, he crossed the forest, and tried to discover the last place where he had heard them baying. After having scratched his hands with the thorns, which made him only the more angry, he came up to his dogs, who were all standing still. Looking through the branches to find out what had stopped them, he saw Fairylight surrounded by birds and animals, and holding the wounded roebuck in her arms, while the lamb, which had grown a beautiful sheep, was caressing her. A will-o'-the-wisp, a real fairylight, was dancing round her, and sometimes playing in her hair. The dogs looked on with wondering eyes; and at the sight of all this, the huntsman entered in a furious rage. "Ha! a sorceress," cried he; "not a doubt of it. It is you who have bewitched my daughter; but now my dogs shall eat you. Ho! Terror! Fangs! Cruncher! Seize her! seize the witch! s-s-s-s!" and he hissed them on.

But in spite of his endeavours to excite them, the hounds remained quiet, as though they were fascinated by the looks of the little girl. He raised his heavy whip to lash them, but they bounded away from him into the forest; so as the night was coming, and he was afraid that they would be eaten by the wolves, he went away to try and recal them, swearing that Fairylight should pay dearly for it.

All the next day the wicked Lord was dreaming and thinking how he could best accomplish his revenge. In

the evening he went out, and turned down a road which was both known and feared in the country round.

At some distance from his castle, and in the midst of a wild and dreary waste, was a deep cavern under a rock, where there lived an old Fairy, ugly and malignant, who had a particular hatred for young girls, especially if they were at all pretty. She had some reason for it, too ; for she was so old and decrepid, that she was bent nearly double, her grey bloodshot eyes were sunk in their sockets ; her face was wrinkled ; she had lost all her teeth ; and her sharp pointed nose and bony chin were so close together, that they seemed to kiss each other whenever she spoke.

The cave in which she lived was hewn out of the rock under a forest, where the trees had never been cut. The threshold, or door-step, was of cracked worn stone, while the door itself was a plank of worm-eaten wood, in which large rusty iron nails were driven. The entrance of this place was guarded by a decayed old man, who had long bony fingers and a shaking head.

At the end of the den, an old three-legged iron pot was placed on a fire, and an old ape, who huddled himself amongst the cinders, stirred the contents with a long notched spoon.

An unearthly dwarf was kneeling down at the fire, trying to puff it into a blaze with his mouth ; but he panted so much as he blew, that the coals would not light each other, and yet the pot was boiling, as though it had stood over a furnace.

“Blow away, blow away ! my friend,” said the old woman ; “keep on blowing ; you have only ninety-nine years longer to blow.”

At this moment the Lord pushed open the door of the cavern.

“Mind what you are about,” cried the little old porter ; “you will break my door to atoms.”

“Shut it quickly,” shrieked the dwarf in a fretful voice ; “that’s the wind that makes my three teeth shake.”

“Who is this child ?” he asked of the old Fairy, seeing the lord, who was at least fifty years old.

Addressing himself to the old Fairy, the wicked Lord

said, "would you like me to bring you a young girl, whom you can make your servant in this cavern, and torment as much as you please?"

"Is she young?" replied she.

"Twelve years old."

"Pretty?"

"Yes, an angel. No other than the little Fairylight; you ought to know her."

The Fairy made a spiteful grimace. "Fairylight," said she; oh, yes, I know her. I detest her: she is the child who was lost in the marsh; and whom the Queen of the Fairies has taken under her protection. I can do nothing to hurt that little girl either; for the Fairy Queen is more powerful than I am."

The Lord was so angry that he called the Fairy all sorts of ill-names; but she interrupted him.

"Do not let us quarrel," said she; "you will gain nothing by that; I can cause some grief to Fairylight; for instance, I can manage to have her lamb devoured."

"Well; so be it!" replied the Lord, as he went away. "I must be satisfied with that; let her lamb be eaten before her eyes."

Fairylight continued to take her sheep out to graze, and to attend to Mammy Lamb'swool. She helped the good dame, as much as possible, in keeping the house; and devoted all the pence she could earn to increase her comfort.

Her good character, her loving care, and her sweet lively disposition, made the happiness of the old woman's life.

Every evening she carried home such little presents as a bunch of pretty wild flowers, or a large leaf full of blackberries, which she had picked from the bushes, sometimes scratching her hands with the sharp thorns; and these simple gifts were amongst the greatest pleasures of Mammy Lamb'swool.

One night they were together in their little room, both occupied with their work: the old woman was spinning; Fairylight was preparing the flax; while her sheep was asleep, with his head resting against her.

On the hearth, a good fire of faggots was burning cheer-

fully, and shedding over the whole place a pale flickering light, which shewed the long shadows of the spinner and her little daughter dancing on the opposite wall. Before the fire-place slept a sleek cat; nothing was heard but the humming of the spinning-wheel, as it kept turn, turn, turning; while Mammy Lamb'swool trod on the little beam, which served to keep it going round and round. With this sleepy sound was sometimes mingled the chirping of a cricket in the chimney, and the satisfied purring of the cat.

Just then, somebody knocked at the door, and all who were in the room—that is to say, the spinner, the flax-preparer, the sheep, and the cat—held up their heads at the same moment, to look for the intruder.

"Who is there?" asked the good dame.

"Open the door," cried a trembling voice outside; "it is a poor woman who wishes to warm herself at your fire."

The widow went to the door; but had scarcely opened it, when she drew back in alarm. Upon the threshold was a hideous hag, bent nearly double, and covered with old rags of clothes. As the door opened before her, she was leaning upon her stick, that she might raise her head, which was concealed under a hood made of red fox-skin.

It was then that the dame saw her skinny wrinkled face, her sunken eyes, and her toothless mouth, which was twisted into a grim smile.

It was the old Fairy, and she was accompanied by a wolf, old as herself, and like her, hideous and skinny; but ferocity gave him an air of frightful strength; and one might have seen, by his bloodshot glaring eye, that he had not eaten food for several days.

At this strange apparition, all the inmates of that peaceful cottage trembled. Fairylight burst into a cry of terror; and the two innocent animals had took refuge near their little mistress, who was as frightened as they were.

Now the old Fairy was standing on the door step, shaking with rage; for the sight of these quiet, good, happy people had filled her heart with jealousy and revenge."

"There you are, then, my beauty," she shrieked to Fairylight; "you are very proud of being under the protection of a Fairy more powerful than myself; but you



shall not escape me so easily;" and she fixed on the poor child a look so malignant, that she shuddered like a bird under the fascinating eye of a serpent. As she repeated these words, she advanced slowly, still followed by her wolf, whose ragged hair bristled, while his eyes were fastened on the sheep, who crouched by his mistress.

The widow had placed herself before the child, so that the fierce animal could not see Fairylight; but when the



old Fairy was but three steps from the dame, she made a sign to her wolf, who uttered a savage howl; and pointing to the sheep which had buried its head in Fairylight's frock, said "Look, look! there is fresh meat; eat, eat!"

At these words the brute sprung upon the poor sheep; but Fairylight leaped up quickly, and at the sight of the little girl, the savage monster stopped, shaking in every limb, and crouching down upon the ground, crawled to her feet and licked them.

The old Fairy was furious. She excited the wolf; gave him several blows with her stick, and even dug her nails into his skin; but the beast, quite subdued by the mysterious influence which Fairylight had gained over all animals by her gentleness, lay there still, while the little girl stood quietly smiling.

"Ah, you little imp!" raved the old hag; "so you charm beasts as well, do you; then may misery, sickness, and all the plagues fall upon this vile house. And thou, useless being, here is thy reward." With these last words, she took off her wooden shoe, and gave the wolf such a violent blow, that he died directly. Then she went out, swearing that she would soon send sorrow and death into the poor cottage.

The apparition of the old Fairy, and her last words, had made a deep and disagreeable impression on the mind of the good dame. She was so struck with them, that being already feeble through age, her strength nearly left her, and she became almost unable to work, though Fairylight continued to re-assure her, and was always full of courage. This little girl still went every day to lead her flock to the pasture attended by her faithful Bleating-pet; for this was the name she had given to her pretty sheep. He had become a friend who was more and more necessary to her happiness. She understood his language, and was pleased in taking care of him, keeping him as white as snow, and gathering the freshest herbs for him to eat.

One day when she came near a brook, she gave him what she called his Sunday toilet. After having cleaned him by washing him in the clear water, she combed his thick wool, rubbed it with the leaves of mint and wild

thyme, to perfume it, and afterwards plucked some field flowers to ornament him. First, she made a wreath of daisies to hang round his neck, then she decked his ears with scarlet poppies, which shone like rubies on his white fleece, and at last stuck corn flowers here and there all over him.

When he was adorned in this way, she was so pleased with his appearance, that she hugged him round the neck, and sat down on a bank to talk to him.

"Do you know, my Bleating-pet," said she, with her silvery laugh, "that you are so beautiful? Do you know that there is not such a lovely sweet-scented sheep in all the country as you are? And you must remember that it is I who have made you so pretty."

Then Bleating-pet looked up into her face, as though he would have said, "I do not know whether I am pretty; but I know that you are good."

Now, in truth, Bleating-pet, had a fleece of wool, so long, and fine, and white, that it was a pleasure to look at it. As Fairylight passed her hand over this splendid coat, she was so proud of it, that she would almost rather have parted with her own hair than with the beautiful tufts of her companion and playmate. She returned that day so happy, that she sang like a nightingale as she walked along the road; and it was a holiday to her to shew Mammy Lamb'swool Bleating-pet, in his Sunday finery. She entered, gay and smiling, followed by the sheep, who was as gay as she. "Mammy," said she, "look, look at beautiful Bleating-pet."

The widow was seated in the chimney corner, with her head resting on her hand; she raised herself on hearing the sweet voice of her little daughter, and Fairylight saw that she was in tears.

"Dear Mammy, what is the matter?" she cried, running up to her, with eyes full of sorrow.

"Ah, my poor little Fairylight," answered the mother; "the baker will not send any more bread till he is paid the little money I owe him; and I have nothing to send him, nothing in the world. I have been so weak for such a long time that I can do scarcely any work, and then all my thread is sold, and I have not enough even to buy

hemp for spinning. What you can earn by taking care of the sheep of the village, my little one, will hardly buy food for you. There is nothing left for me to do, but to go and beg."

Alas! Fairylight had no money, and could only sit down by her Mammy's knee, and cry bitterly with her.

After their sad and meagre supper, the little girl got up, and, without saying a word, went out, followed by her faithful sheep; she strolled along the road, thinking only what she could do to help her mother in her distress.

It was in the month of July, and as the sun had but just gone down; the air was calm; the grasshoppers were chirping amongst the corn; the larks ran backwards and forwards in the furrows, and the blackbirds, coming to drink at a little spring close by, whistled, and sung their evening song; you might have heard them far away.

Fairylight sat down, thinking and wondering, upon a bank, at the borders of the forest, which she so often visited, while her sheep laid himself beside her.

"What!" she said to herself, "she will be obliged to go and beg: to beg, when I am there, I who love her so much, and whom she has fed for such a long time: no, it cannot be; but yet what can I do."

She was very clever at plaiting the branches of hazel and willow into little baskets, which she sold at the houses of the gentry. She thought, at first, of employing herself in this way; but it would take time, and hunger cannot be put off.

While reflecting, she happened to caress her sheep, and passed her hand through his long wool. "How fine it is," said she, "there are many ladies who have not such a beautiful robe as yours, Bleating-pet; you carry a perfect treasure on your back." At these words she stopped, for a sudden idea passed through her mind: "there is plenty of money here," she cried, patting him again, "if one could only sell it." It was a very good thought, but a very sad thought; to sell Bleating-pet's coat, to take away from him that beautiful fleece, which only that morning she had washed, scented, and decked with flowers; but her mother was suffering, and how could she hesitate?

She took her scissors and began to clip that fine wool ; at the first cut she made, Bleating-pet, feeling the cold steel, shivered, and jumped on one side ; but Fairylight controlled herself, and gave a second clip with the scissors, then a third, and a fourth, and at each cut there fell a large white flake, each flake that fell leaving a bare looking place which was very sad to see.

Poor Fairylight felt her eyes swimming with tears, her hand hesitated ; she let her scissors fall. "No," she cried, "I cannot have the courage ;" but when she thought of her mother, she picked up her scissors and went to work again. She cut all off from head to tail, and having finished, shut her eyes, lest she should see the naked shrunken body of her dear sheep.

The night came on while she was sitting at the edge of the wood. It was, indeed, a sorrowful sacrifice which she was making ; she was far from repenting of what she had done, but still she could not help crying.

Presently she thought she heard a strange light rustling sound, and all at once it seemed to be that a bright light shone upon her half-closed eye-lids. She ventured to open her eyes. Then she saw a whole multitude of "Will-o'-the-wisps," playing round Bleating-pet. There were so many of them, and they made such a dazzling glitter that the sheep could not be distinguished in the midst of them. Alarmed at this sight, and afraid that her friend would be burned, she tried to chase away the flames with her apron ; but in spite of her efforts, they continued to dance in and out amongst the wool. At last she heard a voice, which came from a great distance in the forest ; and, listening attentively, she could hear it approach, singing these words :—

"Ye fairies come, the Queen decrees,—
The Queen awaits,—obey her call,
The lights are sparkling midst the trees,
Come to the ball ! come to the ball !"

All the lights disappeared immediately, and left a darkness so profound, that the little girl could no longer see any of the objects around her.

"Bleating-pet ! Bleating-pet ! where are you ?" said she, anxiously to her sheep.

He "Ba-a-a-d" in reply, and came trotting up to his mistress; while Fairylight put out her hand to touch him. She shuddered as she thought that, instead of a beautiful soft silky coat, she would only feel the bare skin; but when her hand rested on his back, she was surprised to find there a thick bunch of wool. "What?" she said to herself; "I must have forgotten to shear that one little place; but that is not strange, when I think how I have been frightened." As she spoke she began to stroke the sheep's back; and judge of her astonishment when she found that it was covered with a fleece thicker and longer than before.

There was no mistake,—there was the wool tied up in her apron as she had placed it after it had been cut off.

"It must be the fairies who have caused your coat to grow again so quickly, my Bleating Pet," she said.

"Thank you, fairies," she added, turning to the wood; "thank you, little brothers, you are very kind."

Then she saw, in the midst of the forest, a bright light, which seemed to smile upon her cheerfully in reply, and immediately disappeared.

Fairylight, whom the Fairy Queen had thus rewarded for her filial tenderness, ran home as fast as she could, keeping on, on, on, across the fields, and almost without heeding the dark night. One thought alone gave her strength; the knowledge that every step she took might save her good mother a tear.

"Do not cry any more, Mammy," she said, as she went in; "we shall have bread, some beautiful fresh bread, and some to-morrow morning too." Then she told the dame all that had happened to her.

This consolation did not last long, however; for, as if the threats of the old hag were likely still to be accomplished, fresh calamities came to afflict that humble and virtuous household. Bread no longer failed; but a greater danger approached the little family; the widow fell sick.

Fairylight stayed at home to take care of her mother; the inhabitants of the village chose another shepherdess; and Fairylight no longer earned anything. All the money which she had obtained for her wool had been spent for

medicine, and such comforts as the sick woman required. She must shear Bleating-pet again.

Fairylight did not, at first, feel very anxious about doing this ; she thought she had in the coat of Bleating-pet a real golden fleece, an inexhaustible treasure, like the purse of Fortunatus, and as quickly renewed. So one day she sheared her sheep again ; and this time it was without grief ; but whether it was that it was badly done, or that she should have been careful to shear him at the same place near the forest, and at the same hour in the evening, one thing is certain, *the fleece did not grow again as it had done before.*

The good dame grew worse and worse, and the doctor ordered expensive medicines, till at last there only remained in the house a brass farthing.

When it came to this, Fairylight no longer knew what to do ; only one dreadful thought came to her mind, such a sad one and so terrible, that she tried to put it off as long as she could ; that idea—and it almost makes one tremble to think of it—was, alas ! to sell Bleating-pet ; the sweet and gently-loved Bleating-pet. But to whom could he be sold ? She knew only of one man who would buy him, and that man was the butcher.

Try as she would to escape from this cruel necessity, the thought would come to her again and again. What grief did she not suffer when, after standing to look at the bed where her poor mother was sleeping, she covered her face with her hands, and called “Bleating-pet !” The poor beast ran joyfully at the voice of his young mistress, and trotted up to her, moving his long tail, and caressing her, by stretching out his nose for her to embrace him ; but Fairylight turned away her head, and, calling her sheep to follow her, walked quickly out, without daring to look round.

In this way, she got as far as the butcher’s shop ; there she saw sheep and calves, from which the skins had been stripped, and still dropping with blood, hanging on iron hooks outside the door. This sight turned her very heart.

“ Oh dear, oh dear ! ” sobbed she, seizing her sheep in her arms, “ and I shall see you in that dreadful state my poor Bleating-pet.”



She kissed him over and over again, while her hot tears fell upon his face, and at last she entered the shop. The bargain was soon made; Fairylight had resolved; she tried to dry her tears, and the sacrifice was complete. She had received the money, put it in her pocket, and was going towards the door, when she heard a plaintive bleating. She could not help turning her head, and there was Bleating-pet trying to escape from the hands of the butcher, and looking at his mistress with sad, rolling eyes. At this sight Fairylight burst again into sobs, and wished to give her friend one more kiss, but the butcher dragged him into the slaughter-house, and the poor child still heard, as she sprang over the doorstep, the wailing cries of her poor frightened sheep. She returned with a heavy heart to the cottage, and put the money, which seemed as though it was burning her hands, into a drawer. After attending to her sick mother, she went out to conceal her tears. She wandered about for a long time in the wood; and then, nearly worn out with fatigue, sat down and gave way to her grief.

She knew not how long she had been sitting, motionless, and with the tears running down her face, when she perceived a "will-o'-the-wisp" spring up from somewhere at her right hand; and, after moving to some distance, appear to go out at the foot of a great oak. These lights had become so well known to her that she often played with them; but at this moment she did not pay much attention to it. Soon, however, another of them sprang up at her left hand, and went in the same direction as the first. Fairylight still kept on crying, heedless of these appearances, which seemed as though they were asking her to follow them; but, at last, a third one jumped up so close to her that she thought it had come out of her pocket, and, like the others, it disappeared at the foot of the oak. This time she could not restrain her curiosity: she rose and went towards the spot where the three flames had vanished. She was astonished to see innumerable pieces of gold and silver, hidden in the cracked bark of the trees. She made haste to pull them out one after another.

"At all events," said she, "I have some good friends.

We are rich now, and I shall not have to fear that my poor mother will be miserable any longer."

She stopped;—another friend might be saved. Bleating-pet, where was he at this moment? with his throat cut, perhaps.

"Ah, if they have not yet killed him,—if there is still time."

Impatient to fly to help Bleating-pet, she quickly picked up her scattered pieces of gold, and fled across the forest. The darkness, the heavy rain, the thorns which tore her clothes, and scratched her face and hands, none of these stopped her. Without following any road, she ran in a straight line towards the village. Rather than go out of her way, she even crossed a brook, where the water came up to her waist, till at last she arrived, breathless and tired, at the butcher's shop. There she was compelled to stop, for her strength left her. Ah! what might she not see there; perhaps Bleating-pet dead, and hanging bleeding on a hook. This fear caused her nearly to faint; but she was restored from this feeling by the stifled bleatings which came from the back of the house. She leaped up.

"Can they be his cries?" said she in terror.

She went in; and the first room that she crossed was dark and deserted. In trying to find the entrance to the shed where the butcher slaughtered his animals, she heard the grinding of a knife which was being sharpened; she felt along the wall, till she pushed open a door, when a frightful sight was before her. She saw, by the glaring light of a great link, or torch made of pitch, the butcher standing surrounded by beasts, with their throats all cut, and holding Bleating-pet between his knees, while with the knife in his hand he was feeling for that part of the sheep's neck which he intended to pierce.

"Stop! oh stop!" shrieked Fairylight, quite beside herself.

The butcher turned round, and saw the little girl.

"Well, and what now? what have you come to look for?" said he, without letting the animal go.

"Stop; oh, do stop!" repeated Fairylight, shewing some gold pieces: "take as much as you want; but let me have my sheep again."

Meantime Bleating-pet, having contrived to slip out of the hands of the butcher, ran to his mistress, who pressed him in her arms, and covered him with caresses, while the man counted his money.

She led away her recovered friend quickly enough from that den, and returned to comfort her sick mother, who, on seeing the gold, was very happy, as she knew that the dear Fairylight had no longer to fear misery.

One evening, as Fairylight was watching the pillow of the poor dame, who was getting better very quickly now she was no longer in want, she saw the door open : she turned round, and in came the old fairy, who had entered without knocking. The child cried out with terror, and hid her face in her hands. The wicked old hag hobbled straight to the bed, extended her skinny fingers over the head of the sick woman ; shook them as if she were sprinkling something from them, and then went out, without saying a word. Fairylight ran directly to her mother ; but drew back frightened ; for the sick woman had become as black as a coal. She was consumed by a burning fever, and did not know her dear Fairylight.

The little girl's heart sank within her, and she wept scalding tears. She was in this state when some one knocked softly at the door. Quite overcome with her sorrow, she did not at first hear it ; they knocked a second time, and then Fairylight, fearing that she should see the old hag come in again, ran to the door, to lock and bolt it. While she was turning the key, she saw a "will-o'-the-wisp" which fell through the keyhole, and began to dance about the room. Very soon it approached the sick person ; and then, all at once, Fairylight observed a beautiful young girl, who looked at the widow with an air of pity and goodness, which quite gave the child courage.

"Good Fairy," said Fairylight, "I know that you are a friend. Do, if you love me, save my poor Mammy."

The Fairy shook her head sadly. "This illness," she said, "is not a common one ; no doctor in the world can do anything. For my part I can only procure the poor woman a little sleep."

So Fairylight began to sob.

"Oh, how sad! how sad! then I must see my Mammy die; nothing can be done to save her."

"Yes, there is one thing," replied the good Fairy, "but it is difficult. In the middle of the Fairy's forest there is a wonderful plant whose juice has such virtue than it can give youth and strength even to the most exhausted body. In order that the plant may not lose this virtue, it must be gathered at midnight by a young girl whose conduct has always been good and innocent. Try, my child, you are protected by our queen; she may grant you a favour which can only be attained by any mortal once in a hundred years. This plant is in the middle of a glade, where no other herb grows; you will see it easily in spite of the darkness; but, to arrive at the place, you must be conducted by one of the Queen's followers. Come to-morrow to the entrance of the forest. I shall be there, and will shew you the road; and, perhaps, may help you."

Fairylight did not hesitate for a moment to attempt that night journey; but she was far from being confident. She was always thinking of that last word which the Fairy had spoken before she went away.

"Perhaps!"

"What danger was there then?"

The danger was very great, though; and the good Fairy had said "*perhaps*," because she knew what had been done by the wicked hag, who had prepared for Fairylight a trial, by which she hoped to be able to conquer her at last. This is the history of what had passed.

The daughter of the Lord, who was Fairylight's enemy,—the child, who was as ugly as she was wicked,—had fallen strangely sick: her whole body had rapidly turned black; and she was burnt up by a fever, which caused her to know none of the people around her.

In this difficulty, the Lord had called the old hag, to ask her what could be done for his daughter; and when she arrived, it was easy enough for her to guess the nature of the illness. She understood, that it was the beginning of a punishment inflicted upon this bad man and his daughter; but she took great care not to say so, and easily persuaded

the Lord, that his trouble had been sent by Fairylight, who, she said, had dealings with fairies,—enemies of his house. “We must punish the crime by a like revenge,” said she, “I will go, and inflict on the mother of Fairylight the sickness of your child.”

It was then, that the wicked old hag had gone to the widow’s cottage, and shaken over the poor woman this terrible malady.

Soon after, she again entered the castle, and said:—



“There is only one remedy which can cure your daughter;” and she told him of the wonderful plant, as the good Fairy had told Fairylight.

The Lord lost all heart at this.

"Listen to me," said the hag; "if you cannot gather the plant yourself, you can at least procure one ready gathered; this is the plan I propose for doing so: I went, as I promised you, to give the malady of your child to the shepherd's widow; the fairies who protect the little girl are quite sure to tell her of the remedy; and she will go some night to gather the wonderful plant. Watch her, watch her every evening, see where she goes when she leaves the house: and when you see her taking the way to the fairy wood, blow a whistle. I will come directly; for I shall be there, but invisible, and will so deaden the sound of your footsteps, that she will not be able to hear you approach. When she has entered the glade, stay till she has gathered the plant; and afterwards kill her, and seize it instantly."

"That will be easy enough," replied the cruel Lord; "for my gun brings down a stag, even while he is running at speed: so it will very quickly bring down a child who stands still."

"You are mistaken," said the hag; "no bullet of yours will ever reach her."

"What is to be done, then?"

"Look here," replied the old wretch, taking a bullet out of her bag, "here is a ball which I have had boiling in my pot for nine hundred and ninety-nine years; and, in the forest, none but that can touch a person who is protected by the Queen."

The Lord took the bullet, and put it in his gun.

Now Fairylight had prepared herself to go and gather the wonderful plant next day. The last words of the good Fairy had caused her some uneasiness; but she resolved to dare all, that she might save the woman who had supplied the place of a mother to her. She went out, when it was quite dark, full of anxiety, looked round her on all sides from time to time; and sometimes stopped to listen, but not a sound was to be heard. Just before she entered the forest, however, she detected the sound of a whistle at some distance. Fairylight was afraid, and once more stood still; but all was silent again directly. Then she entered the wood, and had scarcely done so, when a "will-of-the-wisp" went before her. "It is the good Fairy," thought she;

"I must follow her." The light led her onward half-way across the forest, and there she arrived at a large and deep glade, where the flame disappeared.

Everything was so still and lonely, that not even a leaf seemed to rustle on the trees ; and the space was so vast, that this silence seemed strange and unnatural.

In the very middle of this wild place rose an enormous tuft of herbs, whose violet flowers looked like little flames ; she advanced towards that spot, and knelt down to gather the plant. One by one, she broke off every leaf and flower ; and, when all were plucked, she again stood up. Then it was, that she imagined she heard, not far from her, the crackling of moving branches ; she turned her eyes towards the place from whence the noise came, and saw, not twenty paces off, the shining barrel of a gun pointed straight towards her. She had only time to give one cry of terror, when a loud report followed ; and the echoes of the forest were awakened afar off by a frightful shriek.

Immediately after the explosion, and the bullet having struck, the wicked Lord ran towards the spot where he had seen his victim fall, that he might snatch from her the herb which she had gathered ; but, somehow, he could not reach the glade, as he was entangled in some thick bushes, which all his struggles would not enable him to get through ; yet he had run straight to the place upon which his eyes were fixed the moment before. He made still greater efforts ; but the stubborn bushes seemed to get more and more tangled.

"Strange," said he, "this is the very spot which I saw at the end of my gun ; and it was at this very place that the open glade showed itself." He stopped, and listened for the groans and sighs which he expected to hear ; but only a profound and awful stillness reigned around. He gave a shrill whistle as a signal for the old hag ; but the sound was lost in the deep forest, and no answer came ; and again the same dismal silence seemed yet more terrible : not a bough waved.

Then, uneasiness gnawed his heart ; he parted the branches which entangled his path, and staggered onwards. Greater and greater grew his anxiety ; little by little, he found himself plunging into deeper darkness, and the huge

unmoving trees produced within him a mysterious fear; for he felt that he was alone.

He used every effort to break through the wood, which seemed filled with horrible sights; and, at last, crossing the open plain, fled towards his castle.

His steward was standing on the steps; seeing the pale face of his master, his dishevelled hair, and his torn, stained clothes, he asked if any accident had befallen him.



"But you yourself have some evil message; tell me quickly what has happened," said his master, as he noticed the sad and restless manner of the man.

"Oh, my lord," he cried, "strange things have happened here in your absence!"

"What is it then?"

"Your daughter!"



"Well; and what of her?"

The old servant turned away his head, and retired without answering.

The Lord, full of a vague terror, strode to his daughter's apartment, and approached the bed; but one glance was enough; he started back quickly, at the sight of blood upon the sheets.

Full of dread, with wild eyes, he once more went to the side of the couch, and gazed upon the sick girl. She was dead!

Dead! For the bullet which he had shot at Fairy-light turned away by the Fairy-queen, had pierced a window of the castle, and the wicked daughter of this bad, bad man, lay stricken through the heart. Frenzied, and torn with anguish, he fled from the spot; and, even to this day, though the proud castle has crumbled into ruin, no one has ever heard more of the murderous and unhappy Lord.

It is true, that Fairylight had fallen when the bullet was fired, not that she was hurt, but she had fainted as with mortal fear. When she came to herself and opened her eyes, she was compelled to shut them again directly, such a wonderful brightness encircled her. As she gently unclosed her eyelids, however, she was at length able to bear the light.

The fairy-lights, more numerous than the stars of the sky, were fluttering around her, of all colours; red, green, blue, golden violet, and silver, they darted hither and thither like flying gems. Topaz, emerald, ruby, opal and diamond, they crossed and recrossed each other. Rising, falling and turning, in the deep midnight, they spread everywhere a dazzling splendour. Sometimes they would meet, and for a moment look like an enormous globe of fire, of a thousand gorgeous hues; then one little flame would separate itself, and float upwards into the air; two or three others would follow it, then a great number; till the blazing ball changed its shape into a sparkling pyramid, the foot of which touched the earth, while the top looked only like a single star, almost lost in the dark blue heaven. Soon the pyramid gradually descended, and broke into a thousand fires, which again whirled and soared in a fantastic dance.

Fairylight was watching this magical and wondrous sight, asking herself where she had awakened, when she heard, as it were, under the ground, something which seemed like soft and far-off music. At this noise, all the fairy-lights ranged themselves in rings one above another, so that they formed a lofty pile of circles, which looked as if they were made of brilliant jewels. Soon the earth opened into a chasm, from which a globe of fire mounted slowly into the air. When it had reached the height of the topmost circle, it burst asunder, and the little girl beheld come out of it a young woman of exquisite beauty, who remained standing in the air, resting upon a pedestal of rose-coloured flames. Immediately, soft sweet music filled the whole forest, and the fairy-lights moved themselves, slowly rising and falling, as a token of respectful homage.

It was the Fairy-Queen!

A crown of fires, more brilliant and pure than the rest, shone upon her head; a waving robe, light as a sunset cloud, was folded round her; her eyes beamed with gracious love, and a charming smile parted her lips.

"Fairylight," she said, in tones full of tenderness; "you have been kind and good to her who has been a mother to you; and this has pleased me. Will you come and live with me in my palace? There you shall have nothing but pleasure, you shall be my favourite, and share my kingdom. Come, my daughter; come and sit upon a throne by the side of mine?"

The Queen waited for Fairylight's answer; when that excellent child, who had been till then silent with astonishment, raised her hand, and pointing in the direction of the village, said, with a sigh,—"And Mammy, who is ill?"

The Queen was delighted with this answer, and with the generous refusal of pleasure for the sake of the dear mother.

"Go, then," said she; "good and virtuous child; go where duty and gratitude call thee! Yes, yes; it is at the pillow of thy mother, where thy presence is needed. Take that herb which thou hast obtained through so many dangers, press out the juice of it, restore health and strength to her who loves thee so much, and be happy together!"

When Fairylight returned, she looked in vain for the cottage of the poor widow, and for the castle of the wicked Lord. Instead of the castle there remained only ruined walls, blackened stones, and heaps of weeds and brambles. In the place where once the humble cottage stood, there was raised a splendid palace. Fairylight stopped, astonished, on the doorstep.

"Enter!" said a voice; "this house is thine."

She went in, and found her Mammy in a beautiful room, and lying on a soft bed, surrounded with hangings of the richest silk. The good woman was more composed than when she had left her, and had sunk into a gentle sleep, which was undisturbed by the light footsteps of her little daughter, as she crossed the thick velvet carpets that covered the floor.

The sick person soon recovered her health, thanks to the precious remedy which was so near costing Fairylight her life. Now, too, all was peace and plenty; for you may be sure that the Fairy-Queen rewarded the love and gentleness of her little daughter with gifts, which were, after all perhaps, as truly valuable as the pleasures of the Fairy Kingdom. It is certain, that she added to her wealth and happiness, that real joy which the good heart must always feel in helping the poor and the sorrowful; for both Fairylight and the good old dame made use of their riches in spreading comfort all around them.

The wicked hag, furious at the continued prosperity of Fairylight, had quitted the country.

Some years afterwards, a young, good and handsome prince, who came to live near the old village, heard of Fairylight, and came to visit her. He found that report had only spoken truly of her many virtues; and as she, on her part, learned to respect him, they soon formed such an affection for each other that they were married; and Fairylight, blest with a good husband and a dear mother, was one of the happiest women in the world.



THE GRATEFUL RAT.

THERE was once an old woman who had in her house a Dog, a Cat, and a Rat, that she had brought up together. They lived, all four of them, in a very good understanding with each other ; slept in the same bed-room, took their meals at the same hours, often at the same table, and sometimes out of the same dish. The Cat never troubled herself about the Rat, who was always paying her little attentions. As for Master Lick-pot, the guardian of the house, he was the very happiest of dogs, never barking but twice a-day, once when they went to breakfast, and again at supper time ; passing the greatest part of his time, stretched out at full length, asleep before the fire ; during which period, Madame Mouflette, the Cat, curled herself up and purred between his legs, and the Rat trotted here and there along his body, as the Lilliputians did over that of Gulliver,

One day, the old woman summoned her family solemnly together. All the three sat in a circle on their hind legs, while she thus addressed them.

" My friends ; it is now fifteen years that we have lived together. I have brought you up, nourished and educated you. You, Lick-pot, have turned out a sad idle dog, but you have well guarded the house. As for you, Mouflette, if you had nothing to eat but the mice you catch, you would have died of hunger long ago ; but you are an elegant cat, and your gentle purring assists my slumbers. Rat, my lad, you have never been of any use to me ; but I have not, for all that, turned you out of doors. You ought, then, all of you, to be satisfied with what I have done for you."

Lick-pot took to barking, by way of saying Yes ; Moufflette uttered certain mi-yows, in which might be recognised a heartfelt acknowledgment of her mistress's kindness ; and Rat bowed his little head, in token of assent.

"Very well, my good friends," went on the old woman ; "I see you are not ungrateful, and it pleases me. But times, look you, are about to change. My neighbour, the miller, who is a bad fellow and covetous, is greedily anxious to get possession of my house and my garden. You are aware of his having brought an action against me, are you not?"

Her three auditors gently nodded their heads and wagged their tails, as implying, that, in fact, they were all acquainted with the affair.

"Well then, my friends," their mistress went on ; "I can't say what stories the miller may have told the judge ; but, after what I have heard, I fully believe that I shall lose the action, and that in eight days I shall be without hearth or land."

Lick-pot at once stretched out his snout, and began howling in the most pitiable style, as if his heart would break ; Moufflette squealed like a child when it cries. The Rat, alone, never stirred.

"Crying is not all that is to be done ;" said the old woman, interrupting these dolorous demonstrations. "We must consider how to defend ourselves. As for you, Lick-pot, it is time to throw aside your idle habits, and go out hunting, as quickly as possible, to catch a hare and carry it to the judge, as a present. For you, Moufflette, as you have a pretty white furry skin, and know well how to present yourself and do the agreeable, you must go at once to the judge, and tell him you come from me to free him from the mice which gnaw his bands. And as for you, my poor Raton, since you are fit for nothing, why stop in the corner until my fate is decided. If I gain, you shall always be well fed ; but if I lose, so much the worse for you ; you must then change your lodgings, and look out for a living as best you may."

At these words, Lickpot and Moufflette started off, each on their several errands. As for the Rat, he retired to

his corner, leant his head on one side, and caressed his moustache with his fore-paws, a sign, in rats, of very profound reflection

Moufflette went direct to the judge, made him a polite curtsey, and said to him:—

“I come, Sir Judge, on the part of my mistress, who has a trial pending before you, to offer my services in ridding you of the mice that nibble at your bands.”

Now it unluckily happened, that the judge had on at this very moment, a pair of bands most miserably torn; and he thought the Cat had come to mock at him. He was just about to drive her off with his cane, when he remarked her white and silky fur. “Stop!” said he; “I have not got any ermine for my gown; here is what will just suit me.”

He immediately gave Moufflette in charge for an attempt to bribe him, called his people together, commanded them to kill the too lovely Cat, and with her fur made himself a new ermine.

An instant after this abominable murder, in came Lickpot with a hare in his jaws.

“See,” said he; “here is a small present of game, that I bring you on the part of my mistress.”

“Oh, oh!” said the Judge; “you sport, do you? Have you the right to do so? Let me look at your licence?”

Alas; poor Lickpot had not got any licence!

“There is no need,” said the angry Judge, “for you to make me a present of this hare. I confiscate your hare; and I confiscate yourself.”

In spite of all poor Lickpot could say or do, he was seized and sent a long way off—a very long way off—to a farm belonging to the Judge; where he was sentenced to watch the sheep.

Such was the sad fate of Lickpot and Moufflette, on whom the old woman had counted for winning her action.

Meanwhile the Rat, whom she had thought good for nothing, was labouring hard to be of use to her; he had introduced himself into the house of the miller, to find out what tricks he was after. Just as he reached the mill,

a superb trout was brought in, which the miller wrapt up in fresh grass and ordered to be carried, next morning, as a present to the Judge. The Rat, when he overheard this, took care to mark down the shelf where they put the fish, and squatted down in a corner to watch it. During the night he went and nibbled away at the trout. So when they carried it to the Judge, and he saw it all nibbled and spoilt, he flew in a rage with the miller. "Does this man mean to mock me," said he; "I will remember this insolence, at a proper time and place."

The Rat went back next day to his mistress, whom he found buried in sorrow for the loss of Moufflette and Lickpot. In addition to this, she had another cause for disquietude.

"Ah, Raton," said she, when she saw him coming into the house, "my affairs are going badly, indeed; I am told that this horrible miller has plotted with his lawyer—a fellow no better than himself—to forge some papers, which will make me lose my cause. The lawyer is about to send them in to the Judge; and they have taken their precautions so well, that I shall not be able to put in an answer. If the Judge see these papers, there will be no hope for me. I have lost Lickpot; I have lost Moufflette. There only remains you; and you are not good for anything."

The Rat listened to what she said with great attention, stroked his moustache, and thought over it for half an hour. At the end of that time, he went out without saying a word.

All through the day he prowled about the mill. When night fell, he climbed along the wall, got into the granary by a dormer window, and thence came down into the apartment of the miller, where he sat at supper with his wife and son. In the centre of the table there was a large game pie.

"Remember, John," said the miller to his son, "you are to carry that pie to our lawyer in the morning; and don't forget to tell him to send on to the Judge the papers you know about. Without them, our cause will come off badly."

The Rat snugly hidden in a chink in the wall, lost not



a word of this important conversation. From time to time he pushed his nose out of the hole to see what was going to be done with the game pie. This was put away in a cupboard, which they locked with a key ; whereupon the Rat drew himself back into his hole and waited.

When all the family had gone to bed, he sneaked gently out from his hiding-place, and turned towards the cupboard to search for some opening, but could find none but a little hole in the cornice, so small, that he could hardly get one of his paws into it. Then he set to work bravely, nibbling at the wood, which, luckily, was already worm-eaten ; and at the end of half an hour's hard work, had made an opening sufficiently large for him to pass through, with a little squeezing. Once within the enemy's citadel, the Rat—neglecting the nuts, the bacon, and the cheese which were there in profusion—ran straight to the game-pie, adroitly raised the upper crust, and feasted on the contents. So much of this savoury delicacy did he devour, as well from appetite to please himself, as out of spite to the miller and his lawyer, that he made a hole in it bigger than himself ; so that, when he had handsomely regaled, he squatted down in the place he had dug out, let down the crust over his head, as it had been before, and went comfortably to sleep.

He was awakened next morning by a motion from side to side, such as people feel when travelling by sea. It was the miller's son carrying to the lawyer the pie and his enemy. The Rat heard the thanks which the lawyer addressed to the young man.

" You need not fear," he said to him ; " the papers shall be sent to the Judge to-morrow. Your cause will then be as good as gained."

" You're reckoning without your host, my fine fellow," said the Rat at the bottom of the pie.

The lawyer having directed this dainty present to be set aside for a dinner he was to give next day to some friends, our Rat made his escape quickly from his prison of crust and fat, and followed the master of the house, with furtive steps, to make sure of the place where lay hid those famous papers which were certain to con-

demn his mistress's case. The lawyer sat down to his desk, took up several papers and attentively perused them ; then, finally, to the great relief of the Rat, who was watching him anxiously from a corner of his office, read out aloud the papers in question, stopping at every line to see that all were properly drawn up, so as to ensure the defeat of the Old Woman.

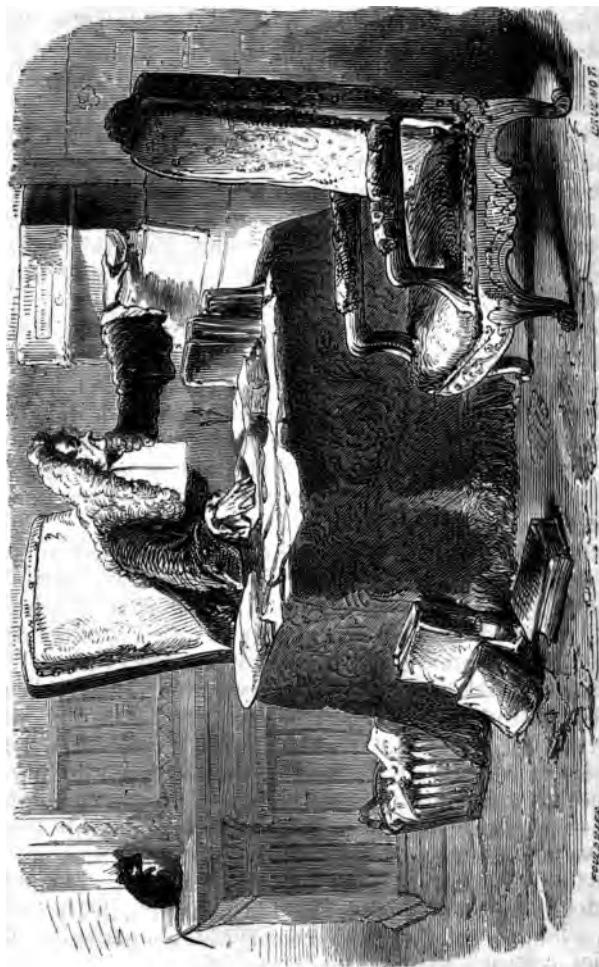
"Good," said he to himself, as he finished reading ; "with this our cause is made sure."

He then placed the papers in a separate box, but the Rat never lost sight of his movements ; and being thus master of the secret he wanted to know, he withdrew into a hole, where he nibbled at some nuts and waited the night.

As soon as all noise had ceased throughout the house, he went straight to the lawyer's desk, climbed over the cases, rumpled and turned over the briefs, made a hole in the box where the papers were secreted, and then, not content with tearing them with his paws, nibbled them with his teeth, so much and so well, that he made terrible rags of them, in less than a quarter of an hour not a single one remained whole.

Then, taking advantage of the night, and the silence that prevailed all round, our Rat ran again into the cupboard, and ensconced himself in the pie ; which he found so good, that he thoroughly emptied it of its contents, so that nothing remained of it but the crust.

This last trick, it must be confessed, was nothing but an act of gluttony on the part of our friend Raton, as well as an act of impudence that had nearly cost him dear. In fact, he was still at the bottom of the pie, nibbling at the last savoury morsel, when he heard a soft step coming across the office ; and, resting his fore-paws and his snout on the top of the parapet of his castle of crust, as he looked out attentively, saw, from the end of the chamber, the flashing eyes of a cat ! He hid himself quickly in his retreat ; but a brief reflection made him comprehend, that there was little safety for him there ; for its walls were not of a character to alarm or resist such an enemy. He slipped out, therefore, without further notice ; and the cat,



who heard him leap down, pounced upon him at once. Raton felt the claw of his enemy on his back ; but lost none of his presence of mind. Quick as light, he turned round, gave the claw a bite ; and escaped by slipping under the door by a narrow crack, through which the cat could not pass. He was just in time ; for, in two bounds, Puss had come up with him ; and, furious at the bite she had received, would have made a heavy reckoning with him. But, on reaching the door, her efforts to find a passage through were all in vain.

Upon this, the Rat, who saw himself in safety, began to think of having a joke with his now powerless enemy ; so, turning round, and putting his snout under the door, he began to squeal, and imitate the plaintive myowings of a cat : a pleasantry which the cat took in such ill part, that she went into a furious passion, scratching and tearing the door with her claws and teeth. Perceiving, however, at last, that her rage had no other result than to redouble her enemy's enjoyment, she suddenly changed her tactics ; and, as if her efforts had exhausted her, uttering a heart-rending cry, that as would mean, in the language of cats : “ I am dying ! ” fell on her back, stretched at full length and motionless.

This trick had often answered her purpose. But she had now to deal with an old stager, who had seen it, and played it off upon others. Raton at once descried the snare set for him, and let a little grunt escape him, which, in the language of rats, was as much as to say, — “ Oh, she’s dead ; bravo ! I can now go in again ! ” at the same time pushing his nose under the door, as if about to re-pass the frontier. The cat, who followed him from a corner of her eye, laughed in her sleeve, — that is, she would have done so, if cats had sleeves for such purposes, — and began to think, what a fine supper he would make : when she experienced, all of a sudden, a sharp pain, that made her draw up her paws, and cry out ; this was through the Rat, who bit her tail, and took himself off, crying : “ Set a thief to catch a thief ! Mistress Pussy ! ”

Next day, the lawyer was astonished at finding his papers in the pitiable state they were left by the Rat.

But his vexation was still greater at dinner. Before opening the pie, he had vaunted highly of its excellence to his guests; when he lifted the crust, judge how he gazed with wonder at finding it empty!

Of course, all the guests, who had made up their mouths to enjoy this so much-vaunted dainty, were highly indignant with the lawyer for disappointing them; while he, on his part, was so angry with the miller, that he pleaded his case so crossly as to lose it completely.

At last, the Rat, who had spent two days in digesting the game pie, of which he had eaten too much, returned, all-exulting, to his home, where he found his mistress bathed in tears.

"I have gained my cause," she said; "but that wicked miller is so enraged, that he swears, he will burn me alive in my own house. He has been prowling about all day under my window. He will set fire to our house to-night; and I, who am a lone woman, aged and infirm, what can I do? Where can I go? What will become of me?"

The Rat sat himself up on his hind paws, and stroked his moustache.

At the end of an hour, he was still in this meditative position; and all the while, the old woman kept on bewailing her sad condition. At last, he got up, and addressed his mistress:—

"When night comes, go quietly to bed, and rest in peace. Before the miller has set your house on fire, I shall have given him something to look after at his own."

Raton started off on a journey. He trotted on for a long time, a very long time, until he arrived at a great lake, which he was obliged to swim across; then he climbed up a steep rock, which was pierced by a hole, and as dark as an oven at the bottom. The Rat entered within this dusky and narrow passage; and, at last, came out into a vast subterranean cavern, that might have served for the grave of an entire town.

It was the City of Ratopolis, the capital of the republic of Rats.

The houses of this city were scarcely higher than a hat. Some of them were built simply of earth: these were the

dwellings of the common people ; others were constructed of nutshells, the bark of trees, and small polished bones ; some even of oystershells : these were the mansions of the grandees, the magistrates, and the nobility. In the middle of the town, the great trunk of an oak, pierced with a narrow passage, by which a kind of platform could be reached, served for a citadel. Above this platform hung a small bell, torn from a shepherd's dog, which had died in the fields. Transplanted hither with unheard-of exertion, it was the great bell of Ratopolis, the alarm that sounded in the moments of greatest danger to their State.

Our traveller mounted the platform, and rang the alarm-bell. At this signal, all the inhabitants of Ratopolis swarmed hurriedly to their place of public assembly. Our hero mounted the tribune, and addressed them in the following terms :—

“ Illustrious citizens of Ratopolis ! A great peril menaces our Republic. In the centre of the country, where I live, an enemy of our race is preparing to exterminate us. He has sworn our destruction ; and he is training, for this purpose, in his dwelling, thousands of cats, whom he is about to lead against us. This barbarous man is a cruel miller, whose vast granaries are gorged with grain and every kind of provision.

“ Let us hasten, while there is yet time, and the cats are yet too young ; let us hasten to prevent and avert this danger. I propose to take advantage of the darkness, and this very night to surprise our enemy while he is asleep.

“ Thus shall we save our republic. I will not speak to you of booty, of the heaps of corn, the sacks of nuts, or the sides of bacon which we shall find in the mill ” (here his auditors licked their lips) ; “ I know you are actuated by no other feelings than those of glory !”

The proposal was carried unanimously. The drums beat to arms ; the ranks were formed, and they marched forth. On coming out of the cavern, which debouched upon the lake, they made an appeal to the water-rats, who joined their army in large numbers. At this time, the war standard was raised, which consisted of the tail of a cat, killed in battle ; and then, the whole army, regulating



its movements by words of command from its generals, trotted off upon six hundred thousand little paws, across woods, mountains, and valleys.

This valiant little army was under the guidance of Raton, who, after three hours' march at a charging pace, brought it in view of the mill. There he cried, "Halt!" and all the army came to a stop.

It was arranged to dig away the foundation of the house, and to wait for its falling down, to pillage it. In an instant, two hundred thousand claws, and four hundred thousand teeth were scratching and biting the earth; they sawed through the timbers, and nibbled away the very stones.

While the army of rats were engaged at this work, Raton kept an eye on the miller. He saw him come out of the mill, with his wife and son, who were as bad as himself. The three advanced together, towards the house of the old woman, and each of them carried a fagot.

The miller mounted a ladder placed against the window of the granary belonging to the poor old woman. On arriving at the top he threw in first his own fagot, then those of his wife and his son. His son handed him a small piece of burning tinder. The miller took out a match to light it, and fire the fagot. Raton, who followed him with his eyes, saw, with anxiety, the blue flame of the sulphur, which the Miller was guarding from the wind with his hand. Happily, a puff of wind extinguished the match. He had to light another. The miller then put this one under his hat, the better to shelter it; at last the match caught, and the wretch was about to throw it amongst the fagots, when a dreadful crash resounded on all sides, and made him shudder with terror. His mill had fallen in! The match fell from his hands on to the ground.

The rats, who had prudently retired to some distance, at the moment of the mill's falling, rushed back to gorge themselves with the vast store of provisions buried amongst the ruins. At break of day they regained Ratopolis.

The miller, as may well be supposed, thought no more of his wicked design. Tormented by conscience, and not

knowing to what cause to attribute such an unforeseen accident, he regarded it as a punishment from heaven. He saw himself, who had desired to usurp, by fraud, his neighbour's house, and had even sought her death, now, by a just retribution, plunged into the most abject misery.

The miller, his wife, and son, seeing themselves nearly ruined, uttered cries of distress. The good old woman compassionated their sufferings, and offered to take them into her house until their mill was built up again. They were too happy to find shelter under a roof which they would have burnt down.

This event changed their hearts; and they became, thereafter, three honest persons.

THE PRINCESS LINDAGULL.

I.

THE HAPPY HOME.

A LONG time ago, there was a King of Persia, named Shah Nadir, who was immensely rich; and whose sway extended over vast and beautiful countries, and many millions of men. There were large halls in his palaces, filled with gold and precious stones; vessels, laden with the spices and perfumes of India, came to his ports across every sea. Whenever he showed himself in the streets of Ispahan, his capital, he was surrounded by a hundred thousand guards, covered from head to foot with armour of silver, that glittered in the sun-light, and one thousand cavaliers, every one of whom rode on a superb horse, with a golden bit, and a saddle embossed with jewels; ready, both of them, horse and foot soldiers, to rush at the least sign from their sovereign, to the conquest of the world.

But the powerful Shah Nadir having plenty of money in his treasures, and every thing comfortable about him, began to regard war as too costly an amusement; besides, he was growing old and no longer felt a wish for combats and conquests. He had won victories enough; had burnt

to ashes a sufficient number of his enemies' towns, and reduced powerful armies to lay down their weapons at the flashing of his powerful sword. He was young then, and his arm invincible. Now, oppressed with years and weariness, he spent the most part of his time stretched on sofas of purple velvet in his brilliant palace. Sometimes—but only when the golden clouds of spring veiled the too fiery rays of the sun of Persia, or when the breeze blew refreshingly from the mountain of Tregroshen—he would ascend his palanquin, and borne on the shoulders of eight negro slaves, clad in silver tissue, come forth from his palace, to pass his army in review or attend some combat of wild beasts.

Shah Nadir had a large family of sons; for he had, also, according to Eastern custom, a great number of wives. But these sons were anything but a pleasure to him. They grew up ambitious and ungrateful; thought their father had lived too long, and panted for his death and his crown. For this reason he had sent them out of the way, into the most distant provinces of his states, where they filled the offices of Governors. He kept none of his children near him, but his daughter—his only daughter, the Princess Lindagull; and her he loved better than all the world, more than all his treasures, more than his kingdom.

This name of Lindagull, which, in the northern language, means Golden Linden, or lime-tree, had been, up to that time, unknown in Persia, where they could not even pronounce it correctly. The Princess had been so called by her mother; who, in fact, was originally from the North, whence, having been carried away by pirates, she was sold as a slave to the King of Persia. So great was her beauty, however, so exceeding her loveliness, that the Shah was not long in raising her to the dignity of wife and queen.

At the time when our story begins, the mother of Lindagull was dead; she had given that pretty name to her daughter, as if to express that she was as beautiful as pure, as the golden rays of the sun, when, in the spring time, they play among the leaves of the linden trees of her native land.

And, truly, it would have been difficult to find, in all the world, a being more charming and more pure than the Princess Lindagall. She had the face and disposition of her mother, with the noble and royal air of her father. Her complexion was as white as the snow of Finland; her eyes gently bright as the stars of heaven, on a fine evening, in the month of August, when the moon is not shining; her heart was full of greatness, tenderness, and goodness; and so it came to pass, that in the whole kingdom of Shah Nadir, there was not a single person who did not love the young Princess, and render homage to her beauty and her virtues.

The old King knew all this; and his spirit, rude and fierce, as it was, became soft as wax, as he regarded his gentle child. She was the joy of his eyes; the repose of his days; his dream by night. A word from her would appease him, however violent his rage; nor could he refuse her anything she asked. So it happened, that, while thinking over the bad disposition of his sons, he formed a project to marry his daughter to some husband who would be worthy of her, and to give to them, that is to her and their descendants, his kingdom for an inheritance.

But even the most just and innocent of feelings, however right in themselves, not unfrequently become perverted in passing through the minds of men. Shah Nadir did not escape this sad fatality. He loved his daughter, with a fondness so excessive, that she was more dear to him than were all his subjects. Now, therein lay a great fault, since a prince ought never to regard his family before his people: but Shah Nadir worshipped this child more than is permitted to worship a mortal being—and this brought upon the old King chastisement from above.

The palace where dwelt the Princess Lindagull was elegant and delightful beyond imagination. It was small; but built entirely of marble; and rose up in the centre of a park, backed by the shade of high palm trees, surrounded by fresh, murmuring streams, and sweet-smelling flowers. The sunlight found its way into the rooms through windows of rock crystal, finely polished. Here,

on soft cushions of silk, the Princess reposed through the night; and, when the day awakened her, she plunged, with the aid of her women, into a bath made of ivory and mother-of-pearl, at the bottom of which gushed forth a spring that enveloped her graceful body with its silver waters. Her days were passed in embroidering the most exquisite fabrics; in listening to the songs of birds; in tinkling her guitar; or in walking in the park, to play with the golden-winged butterflies, or among the purple roses.

The Princess Lindagull was not more than fourteen years old; nevertheless, at the age of fourteen, the daughters of the East are as much grown as the daughters of the North at eighteen.

Now it too often happens that a life of great luxuriosness, and the constant gratification of every wish, is not without danger, as ending generally in causing a vain and capricious temper. This was not the case with the Princess Lindagull; she only fell into a languor and weariness of spirit. The sight of butterflies, the perfume of flowers, the murmur of streams, the tones of her guitar, no longer delighted her; she could not tell why; they had lost all their charms. Every moment she felt the tears coming into her eyes. Such a change surprised even her women. Neither they nor the poor Lindagull understood that no pleasure in the world can be fully and really enjoyed, except in contrast with some regret. It is like the shading in a picture, which throws out light and serenity. Yes, that Lindagull might be perfectly happy, it was necessary she should pass through some affliction.

After trying, for a long while, she believed she had found out the reason of the weariness that annoyed her, and attributed it to the retired life she passed within her palace. She resolved, therefore, to go out more, and to mingle, for once at least, in the tumultuous life of the city. A favourable occasion soon presented itself. The anniversary of the King's birthday was approaching. It would be celebrated, as was customary, by splendid fêtes; among others, by a grand combat of wild beasts. Lindagull, therefore, took advantage of the first visit her father

paid her to ask his permission to be present at the show. The Small White Wind, as we have said before, could refuse nothing to his daughter; gave way to her wish, though not without a sorrowful feeling of responsibility at the becoming of his heart.

—

THE WOODSMAN.

For a short time the young Princess in her beautiful marine palace lay in rest; then her departure from Persia took suddenly so rapid in the glorious sun, and transported themselves to the new regions of the North, to the cold bosom of sea and solid ice. Finland.

There, in the first forests among gloomy pines, and desolate meadows, dwelt a dark and sly spirit, a wicked but expert, of name Fornis. Having remained in the woods he had suddenly learned of the beauty of the forest, for the pleasure of watching the art of sight of persons and animals; places those magic arts in which he had attained the darkness and fearful darkness of all evil spirits. He could when he pleased change his body into a stone, will be transported in soul in all sorts of shapes, away to the most remote countries seeking opportunities for misfortune and the helping up of bodies which no natural means could have placed in his power.

Now this wicked Fornis had a son, but this son was stupid beyond all comparison. In vain did his father endeavor to instruct him in his magic science. The mind of the young man was too sluggish, and his body too lazy for such studies. He liked nothing better to be stretched out on the moss in the sunshade, and to sleep there through the day. His humor for his father's large talk of fat bacon, was in his eyes the greatest enjoyment to be found in earth. For the son of Fornis, as far as appearance went, was in every point worthy of his father; for, like him, he was ugly to look at, dirty, misshapen, and as dimmed and as crooked as a nose at interrogations.

In the course of the wanderings of his spirit over foreign countries, Fornis had become acquainted with everything concerning the beautiful Princess Lindagall;

and learnt that whoever espoused her would become heir to the throne of Persia. As soon as he found this, an audacious project sprang up in his bosom ; he thought to procure for his son not only a beautiful and royal bride, but a crown as well.

If the truth must be told ; the happiness of his son was of no great consequence to him ; for he used him only as a tool, to be thrown aside when useless or inconvenient. What most affected Hirma was the treasure of Shah Nadir, and of Persia ; for he calculated shrewdly that if he could once carry out his project, nothing would be easier than for him to pillage the King's palace ; and then, with his load of riches, to betake himself off again to his own country, leaving his son behind to his fate.

This son of the Sorcerer called himself Sir Morus Pandorus von Pikkuluku, a fine name certainly, but of what use is a fine name, when he who wears it is as ugly as sin ? The Sorcerer, however, made up his mind that the Princess Lindagull should be the bride of Morus, and and become Mrs. von Pikkuluku.

We will now go back as fast as we can to Ispahan, and see how he carries out his plan.

III.

THE WILD-BEAST FIGHT.

ISPAHAN was full of enjoyment. For many weeks, preparations had been going on for the celebration of the royal anniversary. The combat of wild beasts was to be superb. There were elephants and tigers, from India ; hyenas and jackals, from Persia ; lions, panthers and leopards, from Africa. A vast circus had been laid out for this grand spectacle, with boxes and seats all round it, and a railing had been put up between the space for the combat and the ring for the public, so as to ensure the safety of the spectators.

The great day came at last—all the city was stirring. How happy was the Princess Lindagull ! At last she was going out ! At last she would see something new ; a show—and such a show ! She ran about from room to room, bounding, for very joy, like a gazelle.

The gates of the circus are thrown open—the impatient people rush headlong in, and fill the boxes and all the seats in an instant. They are only waiting for the King, who soon makes his appearance, with a numerous and brilliant following; but he is not alone at its head, this time, as at the former fêtes; his daughter, the beautiful, the marvellous Princess Lindagull, rode by his side. According to oriental usage, she was veiled, so that her elegant figure and royal bearing were alone visible to her admirers. She rode a charming little zebra, joyous and proud to bear so lovely a burden. A thunder of applause resounded from every portion of the circus on her entrance. The capital of Persia had not witnessed a sight that pleased them so much, since the day when Shah Nadir, on returning from a glorious campaign, made a triumphal entry there, bringing with him, in his train, twenty kings, as his prisoners.

Doubtless, the young Princess blushed with pride and emotion, but no one could see her do this, on account of her veil. She took her place by the side of her father, on the rich purple cushions with which the royal box was furnished; and the show began.

It was opened by a cock-fight. The birds attacked each other valiantly, fighting in couples, and never leaving their hold until each had torn the other's feathers off, and one or other of them saw his rival fall dead at his feet. This opening scene greatly excited the spectators.

Next entered the lists a wild cat and an enormous falcon, whose wings were cut so as to prevent his flying. What a strange fight! First they menaced one another with their sharp claws; then the falcon drove its beak into the cat's side, while the cat strove hard to fix its teeth in the neck of its adversary. At last, the one tore out the other's eyes, and the falcon expired in dreadful convulsions, while the cat, all bleeding and wounded, was cheered by the people as the conqueror.

To this combat succeeded another, between six Turkish dogs and six Persian jackals. This jackal, rather larger than the wolf, has nearly the same shape; it is a terrible animal, although cowardly. As soon as the six came into the arena, they endeavoured to run away; but the dogs

started off in pursuit, and drove them to defend themselves. Blood began to flow, and three of the dogs had fallen before one jackal; when a whistle was heard from one of the boxes; it was from the young and brave Prince Abderashman, a cousin of the Princess Lindagull, who urged on his favourite dog, the redoubtable Walledikaw. Walledikaw heard his master's signal, and took courage; one after another the jackals fell to his teeth, and he bore off the victory.

After this terrible encounter between dogs and hyenas, a leopard and a panther were let loose in the arena, and a piece of fresh meat thrown before them. The two beasts rushed at the morsel, and fought long for its possession; but, at last, the panther, being the stronger and more nimble, carried it off, after mortally wounding its adversary.

The assembly stamped their feet with delight. All of a sudden, an Indian elephant came forward, bearing on his back a little castle, on the top of which were four archers. It was to fight with a large and magnificent royal tiger, to which had been given the name of the Prince of Darkness, Ahriman. The archers shot arrow after arrow into this noble-looking tiger, to excite his rage. But he remained crouching—his eyes in a flame—lashing his tail; and the people, made still more eager and cruel by what they had already seen, began to think the tiger had made up his mind not to fight, and hooted and hissed him for what they thought his cowardice. At last, one of the arrows hit him in his nostrils; a frightful roar resounded through the air. For an instant Ahriman lashed with his tail the sand, throwing it up around him; then, with a sudden bound, threw himself on to the trunk of the elephant, who, in his turn roared with pain; he shook his trunk convulsively, and raising the tiger above his head, threw him down to the earth, with a force that made everyone think he must be killed. Such was, by no means, the case. At the end of a minute, Ahriman got himself together again; and, leaping on the elephant's neck, struck his claws deeply into the generous animal's throat. Distracted beyond himself with pain, the huge elephant struggled to throw off the monster. But his strength became exhausted; he fell

heavily on the earth; the tower flew into pieces; the archers took to flight; and the tiger, now victorious, gorged himself with the blood of his enemy.

After giving Ahriman a brief time for rest, the wardens of the arena introduced to his notice a superb lion, called, after the Prince of Light, Ormutz, and they pushed between these two beasts, a live lamb. The lion, happening to be hungry, fell at once upon the lamb. The tiger, already full to repletion with the blood of the elephant, but greedy by nature, bounded towards the lion, and attempted to snatch his prey from him. A terrible battle followed between Ormutz and Ahriman, the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness. The air resounded with their terrible roarings, the sand flew in clouds under the strokes of their claws, and was reddened by their blood. They grappled with each other; then they left one another, then they grappled again. The spectacle was terrific; all present trembled. For a long time the combat was indecisive; at last the tiger fell over on his side, the lion had torn open a wide wound in his chest, and furiously dragged out his life. A frenzy of approbation rang through the whole assembly, while Ormutz, the graceful Ormutz, was led back in triumph to his den.

IV.

THE TIGER SORCERER SUCCEEDS.

THE sports were to terminate with a general fight amongst all the beasts. But as the heat of the sun was very great, a few minutes were allowed them for rest, during which the spectators partook of refreshment. Numbers of these, however, made their way down into the arena, for the purpose of seeing more nearly the bodies of the defeated monsters. The Princess Lindagull was herself desirous of seeing what was to be seen. She whose eye had never rested upon any such objects, but birds in a cage and flowers in their beds, could form no idea of what a savage beast could be like. She went down, therefore, followed by her women and her guards, towards the field of carnage, attendant slaves, all the while, unrolling before her carpets embroidered in gold, that her pretty feet might not be soiled by the bloody sand.

Who would have believed it ! The live beasts had all been shut up in their iron cages, while the most redoubtable of all, the great tiger Ahriman, lay lifeless on the arena. Him the royal maiden approached, and admired his fine body, and above all his beautiful skin, that smooth shining skin, which she promised herself to ask of her father for a carpet.

But oh horror ! while Lindagull was looking at him, the tiger gathered himself together, all on a sudden, threw himself upon her, and seized her in his teeth, and took to flight.

A shout of terror rose from all ranks of the assembly ; but no one dared to fly to the rescue of the Princess. The brave Abderahman alone, quick as light, rushed headlong after the monster, came up with and attacked him. Unhappy Prince ! before there was even time to think of going to his aid, he was laid bleeding and lifeless on the sand, while the cruel tiger Ahriman, leapt over the barrier and disappeared, carrying the Princess in his mouth !

Great was the grief of the old Shah Nadir, at such terrible tidings ; great the sorrow in Ispahan, and through all Persia. The old King shut himself up in his palace. He suffered his favourite elephant, bearing his palanquin, to wait in vain at his gate. The chase or the drive no longer tempted him forth. He cut off his long grey hair, and lamented the fatal anniversary that had cost him what was most precious to him in all the world, his much loved Lindagull. He ordained that all the people should go into mourning, the same as for the King himself, and that prayers should be offered up in all the monasteries for the safety of the Princess. A proclamation was fixed up at the same time in all the inhabited places in his empire, in which the King declared, whoever should bring the Princess back alive should have her for his wife, and with her, should inherit the crown of Persia ; while whoever brought back her body was to be rewarded with six mules laden with gold, and other valuables.

The whole of the King's guard, horse and foot, started off at once into the surrounding country. Not a bush, not a grotto, in the whole kingdom but what they explored,

in the hope of finding, at least, the beautiful body of the unfortunate princess. Tigers, and other savage beasts, fell by hundreds under the throw of their lances, but without result. After having thus explored one half of Asia, they were obliged at last to return to Ispahan, with the sad tidings that they had found nothing.

The hope of a recompence so matchless, stirred a great number of young noblemen and princes to attempt the adventure. But sooner or later, they all came back, without having accomplished anything; all, save Prince Abderahman, who resolved to devote five years to searching after the Princess, and to bring her back or die in the attempt.

We, who are already acquainted with the sinister project of the Sorcerer Hirma, can much more easily follow his traces. If Lindagull had been carried off by the real tiger, Ahriman, we should have nothing else to do now but close our story; for with wild beasts of that nature, nothing is sacred, not even the most lovely, the most gentle, of all princesses in the world.

But such was by no means the case.

The wicked Hirma, hearing that a combat of wild beasts was to take place in Ispahan, determined to profit by the circumstance. Consequently, while his body remained, like a lump of stone, in his icy dwelling at Sin-marla, his spirit winged its flight towards the Persian capital. There, during the combat between the lion and the tiger, it hovered over the circle for a long time, looking out for the moment when one or other of the combatants should fall down dead. Then it slipped itself into the still warm carcase of Ahriman, and communicating to that a kind of seeming life, made use of it as an instrument to accomplish its odious designs. By the power of its ~~magic~~ knowledge, it imparted to the tiger a speed so rapid, that it arrived the same evening, with its precious burden, at Hirma's dismal residence.

The Princess Lindagull was not dead; she was not even wounded, she had only fainted, from the effects of fear. As soon as she came to herself, she called for her women, for she still thought herself in her fine marble



palace, and imagined she was waking out of some unpleasant dream. But her women were far, far away, and the home to which she had been brought, did not at all resemble a palace. The beautiful princess, stripped of her holiday dress, and her jewelled ornaments, was laid upon a hard bed, in a poor and small chamber, scarcely lighted by a narrow window, opening upon a pine forest of savage aspect.

She jumped from her bed, trembling with affright, as she called to mind how she had been brought there; how the tiger carried her off in his jaws. Then she fancied herself dead; and thought she was buried, and under ground; so dark was it in that place, and so sunless.

"Poor little Lindagull," said she to herself; "your young life has gone out, like a star newly lighted; never, never again will you see your beautiful palace, nor your flowers, nor your birds, nor your poor old father!"

And the princess wept bitterly.

Poor little Lindagull; who is to bring you aid? There was she alone, a prisoner, separated from all she loved; condemned to dwell under the same roof with beings, the most ugly and repulsive of all nations; she, who had ever been surrounded by friendly faces, and young and graceful beauty. She compared in her mind Morus Pandorus von Pikkuluku with her handsome cousin, the noble, the brave Prince Abderahman, who had so resolutely thrown himself in the very jaws of the tiger to save her; and she heaved a deep sigh. She thought with despair on her father, on the tears of her women and her companions, and she felt herself so sad—so sad. . . .

The wicked sorcerer, who had resumed his natural shape, hearing her complain, came into her presence for the purpose of trying to console her.

"Don't cry, my pretty little Princess," said he to her in a voice as gentle as he could make it; "you are not dead. You are alive. You have not even the slightest scratch. A horrible wild beast seized you in its jaws and carried you off, far from your own country: but be at ease—my brave son saved you. At the risk of his life my son slew the tiger, and brought you to my poor dwelling, where you

lie just like a pearl in a golden casket. We will be your servants, your slaves ; we will lavish on you the tenderest cares, as long as we can possibly keep you with us. Meanwhile, I ask permission to present to you my son, your preserver, the brave Sir Morus Pandorus Pikkuluku the highest desire of whose life is to prove his respect and love for you."

Then, without giving Lindagull time to reply, the sorcerer introduced to her presence his misshapen son, who, besides an enormous sabre hanging at his side, was grotesquely wrapped up in a jacket and turban of scarlet, which Hirma had stolen from some bazaar at Ispahan.

V.

THE TRANSFORMATION.

SIR MORUS PANDORUS PIKKULUKU made, in the most awkward fashion possible, a bow ; which his father had taken a thousand pains and six months to teach him to perform properly. He followed this up by throwing a leer of self-satisfaction at the Princess, as much as to say, "Look at me well, am I not a charming fellow ; just the man to suit you for a husband !" Then he squinted at her so abominably with his little grey eyes ; that Lindagull turned from him with horror.

But Hirma and his worthy son took this movement of disgust for merely a sign of modesty, and were thoroughly satisfied with themselves. Remarking, besides, that the princess must be very much fatigued ; they withdrew, closed the door after them, and left her to herself.

Whereupon, in the middle of all her sorrow, she went to sleep ; for Lindagull, as we know, was still but a child.

Scarcely had slumber closed her eyelids than all around was changed. The good old Rukku-Matti, her natal genius, glided in, invisibly to her, raised her in his arms, and bore her away to a grotto in the Flying Islands. What a delicious place to dwell in ! Here all is flowers, diamonds, and light : a gentle strain of music, that seems to come from afar, soothes every care of the soul, and wraps

it in an harmonious repose. Poor Lindagull felt herself so calm, so happy, that she fancied she was back again in the beautiful rose gardens of Ispahan. When she opened her eyes, there appeared around her, her old father, the knightly Abderahman, and the charming throng of her women. They all regarded her with a loving smile, and said to her, "Cease your lamentations, dear little Lindagull; although you are a prisoner to that wicked sorcerer, you will soon be restored to us; and until then, we will come and see you every night."

It was but a dream. On awaking next morning, the princess found herself in the same vile chamber and in the midst of the hideous inhabitants of that desert. But she no longer permitted herself to be a prey to sorrow, knowing that when the night came she would see those she loved so well again; and that the day was near, when she would return amongst them, never more to be parted.

It was not long before the sorcerer Hirma made his appearance, bearing a roast pullet for her breakfast; his son following on his heels to pay a morning visit. But the princess, hardly knowing how to endure this personage, thought it best to dispense with all ceremony in regard to him. Without rising from her seat, then, and with all the air of majesty she inherited from her father :—

"Wretched sorcerers, impudent liars," said she to them; "how long will you defile with your presence the dwelling of the daughter of a king. Leave this place, instantly, nor show yourselves again before my eyes, until you come to give me the means of returning to my father, the King of Persia, the great Shah Nadir. Tremble at his rage!"

Hirma and his son were so disconcerted by this unexpected address, that they hastened back the way they came. They could not imagine by what means the princess had been informed of their imposture.

"This bad humour is not likely to last long," thought Hirma. Then, addressing his son,— "All hope of obtaining the hand of the princess by kindness, is gone; henceforth, we must compel her consent. I am going to treat her with harshness; but do you, on your part, keep up the same appearance of gentleness and tenderness as before,

so that she may be induced, at least, to put up with your presence."

From that day, then, the wicked Sorcerer never again showed himself to the princess otherwise than in the savageness of his true character. He told her, in severe terms, that it did not become her to show so much pride and petulance; that he had made choice of her to be the wife of his son, his brave son, the handsome knight, Sir Morus Pandorus von Pikkuluku; and that, if she continued obstinately to refuse so enviable an offer, she should remain a prisoner as long as she lived. In the other case, he would supply her, immediately, with the means of returning, with her illustrious spouse, to the Court of Persia.

Hirma every day repeated a discourse of this character to the Princess, which she heard with a superb scorn, and never deigned to reply one word: she showed herself as superior to fear as she was to flattery. Such a resistance was a method of proceeding the Sorcerer could not understand or explain; and he grew enraged at not being able to divine what caused it.

This cause was a very simple one: we know it already. The Princess Lindagull, carried away every night by the good Rukku-Matti, found again, in her enchanted grotto, all the memories that were so dear to her; and gained from them a new strength, and renewed courage. If the wicked and cruel Hirma deprived her of food and drink, she found in the Grotto of the Winged Isles a choice, constantly varied, of the most exquisite viands and delicious refreshments. A thousand happy visions gently soothed her: there was her father; there, too, was Abderrahman; there were her charming companions, whose loved voices she could hear murmuring: "Courage, courage, little Lindagull; your preserver will soon arrive!"

Every morning, Lihdagull took a walk in the wood which environed her sad dwelling; for they would not permit her to go very far: Hirma and his son never losing sight of her. She would sit down on some block of granite, and look at the sun, the clouds, the lofty pines, the little birds flying from branch to branch, and the pale

flowers of the heath that formed a carpet for her feet; and she would sing, as she had once sung in her flower-gardens of Isahan:—

Little bird, that warblest so sweetly,
Canst thou guess the dream of my heart?

Pretty flower, so rich in perfume,
Canst thou, too, love like Lindagull?

Then, the little birds would reply to her, in their own language, from the top of the high trees: “Yes, we guess the dream of your heart: you are thinking of Abderahman, beautiful Princess!” And then, the delicate heath-flowers, blushing redder at the charming questions of Lindagull, inclined their heads to the breath of the wind, as if they would say,—“Yes, we, too, the pale children of the icy region, we know what it is to love like Lindagull!”

Meanwhile, the Sorcerer remarked, with anger, that, in place of being afflicted and despairing, the Princess, on the contrary grew every day more gay and flourishing. So he turned over in his mind a new piece of rascality. He resolved to deprive her, by some of his tricks of sorcery, of her beautiful human shape: and to fasten her down entirely to the earth, so that she might suffer there from cold and the inclemency of the season. By this means, he reckoned to reduce her obstinacy and disdain.

Thus it came to pass, that one morning, while Lindagull was walking in the wood, and singing her every-day song to her birds and the flowers, on a sudden she felt her body tremble all over, and begin to strip itself as it were, away from her; her limbs spread out into branches, a wild perfume penetrated through them all; and when she recovered her senses, she had been changed into a little heath-flower, which lifted up its stem on an arid moor, in the midst of a crowd of its sisters. At first, she was seized with a shudder of fear; but soon felt a kind of soft delight in being in their society. She inclined her head, like them, to the breath of each wind, and prattled with them. Had not they said to her, that they, too, could love like Lindagull?

VI.

THE BRAVE PRINCE ABDERAHMAN.

LET us quit the young princess for an instant, and see what has become of the brave, the noble Prince Abderahman.

Followed by his faithful dog Walledikaw, he went, from city to city, from country to country, searching for some trace of his lost Princess; but his enquiries were without success. For all this, however, having undertaken to travel all over the whole world on that mission, he allowed no fatigue, no danger to discourage him. At last, he arrived at the extreme North, at a region he had never heard of before, named Finland. There, after wandering about for a long time, for the country is scantily inhabited, he lost his way in an immense desert. There was no trace of human footsteps; nothing but pines and heath. The prince was worn down with fatigue; and, full of anxiety, sat himself down near a spring, to gain a short repose, giving expression to his laments as follows:—

“ Oh, dear and beautiful Princess Lindagull, shall I never meet with thee again! thee, whom I love more than all on earth! Alas, this desert may be, perhaps, my tomb; but I shall die content, since it is for thee I die! May some kind angels whisper this to thee in thy dreams!”

Now, fate had so willed it, that the Prince was sitting precisely on the bank, where Lindagull, changed into a heath-flower, was lying in the midst of her companions. She heard these words, and the little heart of the flower leapt at them; but she was without voice: she could only incline her feeble stem, and the Prince did not remark this. His eyes were fixed on the other side, where his faithful Walledikaw appeared to be setting at something. Quickly, the Prince fastened his horse to a tree, seized his lance, and, stepping forward, arrived at a cabin; before the door of which cabin, what object was it that astonished his sight? The very head of the tiger Ahriman, suspended over it like a trophy.

The sight of this gave him a swimming in the head.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "it is here, then, that I am to find again my much-loved princess!" and he rushed into the cabin.

The Sorcerer, Hirma, was just coming out to quiet the dog, who was barking after a most sinister fashion. Abderahman took him by the shoulders, and shaking him roughly,

"Quick!" he exclaimed, "give me back my Princess Lindagull, or you are a dead man!"

The Sorcerer, as we may suppose, was not a little taken by surprise. However, he endeavoured to remain unmoved, and said,

"What have I to do with your Princesses. Go look for them where you please; anywhere else but here."

Abderahman's anger knew no bounds.

"Ah, miserable scoundrel, I am now sure it was you that stole my beautiful Princess; and that you are detaining her a prisoner here; take thy reward!" and, with one stroke of his lance, he ran the Sorcerer through the heart, who fell heavily on the ground, where he rendered up his wicked soul.

VII.

THE RESTORATION.

SCARCELY had this act of justice been accomplished than the Prince bitterly repented it.

"Wretched man that I am," he exclaimed; "I have slain the only being in whose power it was to tell me the fate of my Lindagull! and now, perhaps, she will languish for ever, bound in the chains of some hideous sorcery."

And it was within an ace of so happening; for the Sorcerer's son, the brave Sir Morus Pandorus Von Pikkuluku, when he saw, through the trees, the punishment inflicted on his father, hastened to throw off his clothes, and fly from the vengeance of Abderahman; nor did he stop until he reached a village, where this ambitious pretender to the throne of Persia contented himself, for the rest of his days, with the humble occupation of a guardian of pigs. Thus, in the whole country, there was not one single being in existence who was able to

inform the Prince that the beautiful Lindagull had been changed into a heath-flower; no more could the poor Princess herself.

But the kind Rukku-Matti came to their assistance, by sending to the weary Prince a gentle dream. In this dream a vision of the beautiful princess balancing herself on the stem of a heath-flower, in an arid plain, the same spot, in fact, where the true Lindagull was sighing in the shape of a flower.

Abderahman quickly caught the hidden import of this vision, and went off, at once, to the bank where the heath-flowers were growing. He chose from them the most charming, the one that trembled most gracefully under his hand, and seemed to regard him most lovingly with its soft eyes. Then he placed it next his heart, for he felt sure he had found again his dear Lindagall, and betook himself, as fast as possible, back on the road to Persia.

On arriving in the kingdom, his story excited immense joy there; but, at the same time, very great perplexity. The old King summoned, in great haste, to his palace, an assembly of the wisest men of his States, with all the celebrated magi or priests, and demanded of them what should be done to restore to a heath-flower the human form. No one could tell him.

At last the most venerable and the most illustrious of the magi rose and pronounced these words.

"My Lord, the King, what is impossible to human art is possible to love. So soon as some one is found in your kingdom, so tenderly and so sincerely attached to the Princess, as to undertake, for her sake, to go round the world, and always be ready to sacrifice his life for her, let this man be also loved in his turn by the Princess, and a kiss only from him, on the flower, will suffice to work the prodigy you seek: you will then see Lindagull awake from out this enchantment as if from an unpleasant dream."

When the old Shah Nadir heard this announcement, he sent for the Prince Abderahman, and repeated to him what the magi had said. The true, loving Prince, hesitated not a moment, but took the pretty flower in his hands, and

kissed it with all the love of his heart. Immediately the flower trembled in every fibre, and shook with joy ; next, slipping from the hands of the prince, it stretched itself, it dilated, as if tearing away some band that bound it. At last the human shape re-appeared, all entire, and the Princess Lindagull, more beautiful, more radiant than ever, threw a look of tenderness and recognition on her aged father, and the prince, her preserver.

At the news of this happy event, the city of Ispahan and the whole of Persia resounded with shouts of delight. The nuptials followed with all proper speed. Shah Nadir invited to them all the most illustrious princes and princesses of Asia. Never since the time of Alexander the Great was there seen such splendour, such gold and silver, diamonds, flowers, and perfumes, or such a profusion of wealth and luxury : poets sung at this unequalled festival, and praised to the skies the might of the King, and the marvellous happiness of the wedded pair. Some time after, the old Shah Nadir, full of years, went gently to rejoin his ancestors, after leaving his crown to Abderahman. That Prince lived long as a powerful King, fortunate in war, and wise in peace. A numerous posterity flourished after him and the Princess Lindagull; but never, since that day, have they celebrated combats of wild beasts in Persia.

THE STORY OF THE SEVEN-LEAGUED BOOTS;

BEING

MORE ADVENTURES OF HOP-O'-MY-THUMB.

YOU will all remember that the last account we have of Hop-o'-My-Thumb leaves off exactly at the time when he has got himself and his brothers out of the claws of a terrible ogre, after stepping off with the SEVEN-LEAGUED-BOOTS of that child-devouring giant. We are

able to give you, at this time, news from fairy-land; wherein its history is carried up to a later date, some further account of the adventures of that ingenious young gentleman Hop-o'-my-Thumb, and the dangers and wonders that arose from his wearing those Seven-Leagued-Boots, and taking such very large strides, with so very small a body.

And first, we have to recount to you what happened to Hop-o'-my-Thumb in the Island of Hunchbacks, and how he got there.

Once back again in his father's house, and the proud proprietor of the Seven-Leagued-Boots, Master Hop-o'-my-Thumb set to work to consider how he could make the best use of them, and what part he ought, for the future, to play in life. He took some time to mature his plans, then called the family together, bade them good-bye, and started on a tour round the world.

His style of travelling was very rapid, and his view of the country, for the most part, a bird's-eye one. Each step being seven leagues, and each league being three miles, we need not tell such clever scholars as you all are, what you have learnt so well from your tables, that three times seven are twenty-one; and that he, therefore, went twenty-one miles at each step. A good stretch that, certainly; but such as those who would not believe it before you were born, could not venture to doubt now, for there are great steam carriages that go a hundred miles an hour, dragging after them waggons with hundreds of thousands of pounds in weight, although these steam carriages have only wheels to run upon, and iron rails to guide them, in place of boots made by fairies, and set in motion by such clever fellows as Hop-o'-my-Thumb.

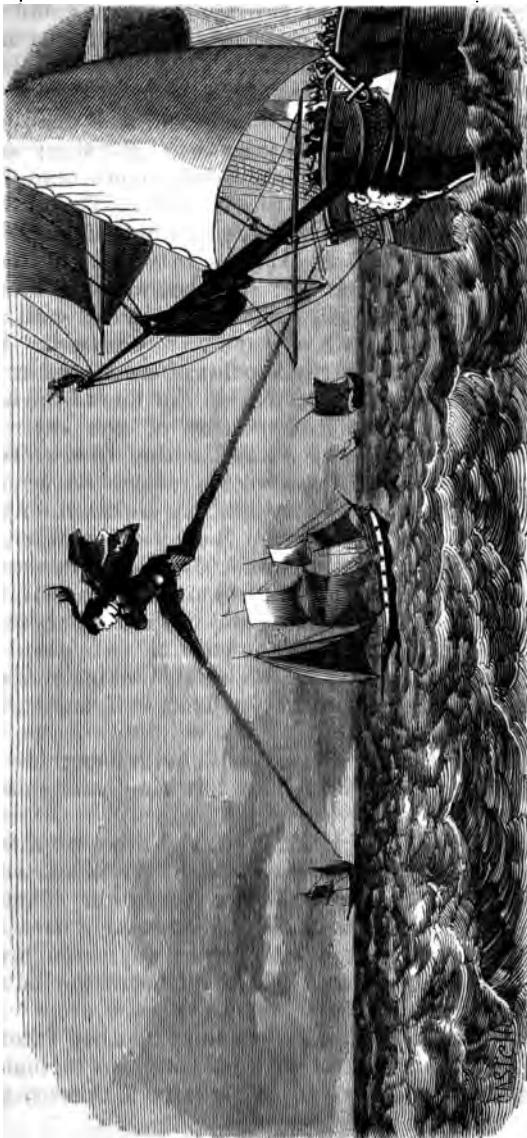
He was right across France in eight or ten steps; that is, as far as he could go, from his father's house to Calais, where he halted at the sea. Now, to cross from there to England, it is necessary to get over the strait, which we call the Channel, and which is just seven leagues wide. This was a matter of one step; the boot on his left foot was still resting in France, when the other trod upon English soil.

But Hop-o'-my-Thumb did not much admire England, as he happened to arrive there in November, and found it very foggy after the dear brilliant air of his native province : besides, the people, he said, drank beer instead of wine. So, after a flying visit to London, and the country twenty-one miles round it, he took a survey of the rest of England in a few paces, and once more reached the shore of the ocean.

Here he saw himself checked by a barrier that seemed at first impassable, inasmuch as he could only manage seven leagues to cross the sea, whose leagues counted by hundreds and thousands, and his boots had not the power of walking upon water. What was to be done ? He did not know, and he could not tell ; so, clever fellow as he was, he did something at once. He took a passage on board a ship that was just starting off, blue Peter at the fore, and her topsails shivering in the breeze. Whither she was bound he neither cared nor asked ; for what did it matter to a man (Hop-o'-my-Thumb called himself a man, as all young persons of any independence of character always do ; indeed, there are no boys now anywhere in the world, except "Eton Boys")—to a man we say—when he is going a voyage round the world, whether he begins at one country or another ?

When the ship spread her white pinions in full sail, Hop-o'-my-Thumb was delighted, and thought he had never seen anything so pretty or felt any motion so pleasant. But when the first sea-sickness came over him; alas ! for poor Hop-o'-my-Thumb, who soon found that young Frenchmen were not born sailors. So he was not long in proving to himself that sailing was very slow work, especially with the wind dead against you ; and as steam-boats had not then been invented, and the captain had only sails to use, he began to be mortally tired of the journey ; especially when he reckoned that after three days at sea, he had got over no greater distance, than he usually stepped over in three hours on land.

"This tortoise of a ship does not go along at all," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb ; "in this dragging way, I shall never arrive there at any hour. I have calculated that my journey



would not last more than two months or so ; and it will take me two years, three years, ten years. I have not the time to dawdle along at this rate, and must think about some other method of travelling."

But he was now out in the open sea, and there was no way he could imagine for getting out of the ship; so there he was in the middle of the solitude of ocean, like a squirrel in a cage. For all this Hop-o'-my-Thumb did not give way to despair; he had wriggled himself out of many a worse scrape than this. He was sitting on the deck of the ship, resting his head on his hand, with his eyes fixed on the vast extent of sea, while he meditated with all his strength for some means of getting away from it. Before him, extended to the extreme point of vision, the unruffled surface of the blue waters, that on the line of the horizon seemed to mingle with the azure of the sky. Upon this surface, sails were seen afar, looking like white little spots. Some of these were closer, and he could distinguish, among others, a ship, which appeared to be not more than a few leagues from him; then another, separated from it by almost the same distance; then another, still further off; lastly a long succession of vessels, sailing at intervals, of some leagues; the farthest of these being lost in the blue mistiness of the horizon. He gazed on the spectacle with curiosity, all the while thinking of his plan; until, suddenly he tapped his forehead, as if, at last, he had found what he wanted.

"That's the very thing," said he, raising his head; "and now, let us be off, I have lost time enough already in stopping here."

So saying, he stretched out his right foot over the sea, and put it down seven leagues from where he started, on a ship that was sailing far in advance of his own. There is no need to say how the sailors stared at seeing a boot, on the sudden quit their deck, and thread its way through the air like a bird on the wing. Those on board the next ship were not less astonished, when they saw drop into the middle of them a foot that seemed as if it had fallen from heaven. But they did not see it for long; since Hop-o'-my-Thumb, as soon as he caught sight of another ship, that

was seven leagues a-head, lifted his left foot there at once; then his right foot on a third, seven leagues farther; and so from one to another, until he at last reached the land in such a manner, that these ships, scattered over the sea, served him as the stepping-stones we place at distances to put our feet upon in crossing a brook. The sailors knew not what to think of this new-fashioned kind of a traveller, when they saw him, as he flitted over like a shadow, and whose boots appeared, only to disappear off their decks.

But whither had he arrived? On an island, or on a continent? He knew not, nor did his examination of the surrounding country render him much wiser; although several of the features it presented were remarkably curious. It was a vast region bristling with little hillocks, that had the air of so many lumps or hummocks, in such a fashion as to make travelling over it a perpetual series of ascents and descents. The trees were distorted and stunted, while all the animals, even the least of them, had the look of toy camels.

"A comical country this," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb; "it is not at all like my beautiful forest at home; but let us have a look at the interior and its inhabitants."

As he journeyed forward, the first person he met was a hunchbacked man; the second a hunchbacked woman; as for the third, they were a couple of hunchbacks, a man and a woman, who were walking arm-in-arm, in a sentimental fashion; apparently well pleased with each other and themselves.

"I am out of luck," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb; "it is a bad sign to meet hunchbacks. There is but one in our whole village; these four are probably all the hunchbacks in the whole of this country, and it is precisely because they are so that I meet them at once; decidedly, I am out of luck."

But he had not yet done; there were plenty of hunchbacks yet to be seen; for he had happened, without knowing it, on the Island of Hunchbacks—an isle not spoken of by travellers, and consequently not set down in any geographical sheet.

Judge, then, how great the wonder of Hop-o'-my-Thumb,

on entering the nearest town, to see all the population with crooked backs. Every one had his hump; and the bigger it was, the more beautiful it seemed to be thought. The most distinguished personages were those who had two humps, one behind and one before; so that Punch and Judy would have been phœnixes of beauty in that country. Our traveller did not at all understand this fashion. He surveyed all the inhabitants with an air of pride, as much as to say, "Look at me; you have now the good fortune to see a man." What still further heightened this feeling of pride, so greatly out of place, was the general curiosity of which he found himself the object. Every one turned around to look at him; some even made a dead halt, whispered to one another, and smiled. "They are admiring me, these poor people," thought he. So he held up his head to look handsomer, while the laughter increased, and they pointed at him with their fingers. Our hero soon came to know that they were mocking him. The young hunchbacks passed by his side with loud laughs. In a word, they regarded him in the light of some strange being degraded by nature, or some curious animal; he was like a camel without a hump, in the capital of a nation of dromedaries.

"How comical he looks, with his flat back," said one.

"Don't let us notice him," said others; "he is too ugly."

The more benevolent contented themselves with observing, as they cast looks of compassion on him, "Poor child."

At last he understood that he was out of his place in the midst of all these hunchbacks; and that what passed for beauty with us, would, with them, be justly regarded as deformity, because a deviation from the ordinary scale.

Humbled out of his pride, as a straight man, he thought it as well, by way of regaining everybody's good opinion, to announce his name. "I am Hop-o'-my-Thumb," he said to them emphatically.

They stared at him with fresh surprise, as if not knowing what he meant. This name, popular as it was among us, had not yet reached as far as that island! This second check deeply humiliated him.

"Thus it is," he reflected, "I am more handsome than these people are; I am illustrious, and yet they scoff at me! and amongst them I am an obscure person, and a



deformed creature. O the vanity of glory and of beauty!"

This reflection led him back to more reasonable feelings. In place of priding himself on his shape, and

scorning the hunchbacks, he began to consider how to make the best of his position. It was not usual with him to be long in a puzzle; so his resolution was quickly taken. He ran and bought two large bundles of wool, which he disposed properly under his clothes; and next morning made his appearance in the great square of the town, with two humps got up for the occasion. At the first sight of him, a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd. All eyes were turned upon him; every lip murmured his praises.

"The handsome youth," said one.

"Look there," went on another, "how large and finely rounded off is his front hunch."

"And the one behind!" said a third; "how gracefully it rises above his shoulders! His head can scarcely be seen! Ah! what a handsome hunchback!"

"But have you noticed," said a woman, "how young he looks; and his humps will be still growing. I am sure that at thirty years of age, they will be joined together over his head; what a handsome fellow he will be then!"

"Don't look that way," said a mother to her daughter, "or else you will fall in love with him; and it is not with such as you he will marry. He must have a duchess or a princess!"

At last, there was a continual concert of admiration, and praises loudly expressed.

Our hero strutted about like a peacock, in the midst of the crowd, sniffing up the fragrance of their incense, as he spread out to the sun, with great complaisance, his two false humps, and laughed in his sleeve at so unexpected a glorification.

The report of his name, and the renown of the beauty of this illustrious Stranger, spread themselves rapidly throughout the whole island; nor were they long in reaching the ears of the King, who expressed a desire to see, with his own eyes, a person who excited such great admiration amongst all his subjects. Hop-o'-my-Thumb was, therefore, summoned, without delay, to the Palace.

This royal building presented no very great features of beauty; it was, in fact, a dome, or rather a hump of stone,

with three round holes, that served for entrances. Within the great hall, the Royal Majesty of the Island of Hunch-backs, was seated on a throne, surrounded by the great officers of his kingdom, his courtiers, and the handsomest men of his nation, that is to say, those with the finest humps. The King himself, a fat, broad, short, and heavy personage, had three humps, one before and two behind, not to reckon his stomach, that might have well have passed for a fourth, and by far the biggest of all; so that his person, altogether, formed one enormous ball, or a huge mountain, stuck over with little hills. At the sight of this truly great personage, Hop-o'-my-Thumb could not contain his merriment any longer, and burst out laughing, which the King took as a flattering sign of his admiration, bridled up his head among his humps, and shewing himself, from that moment, so important are first impressions, favourably disposed to the new arrival.

"Beautiful young man," said he, with a kind smile; "whence came you? By what happy chance have you arrived among us?"

"Great King," replied Hop-o'-my-Thumb, "at once the most handsome and the largest humped monarch in the universe" (his Majesty was evidently tickled at these words, and graciously smiled) "I came from a country situated at the extremity of the world. It was my misfortune to be born in the midst of men, who have all of them flat backs."

A murmur of astonishment, mingled with disgust, ran through the assembly, and his Majesty himself made a horrible grimace.

"Wearied of being among a race so ugly," went on Hop-o'-my-Thumb, "I came to a resolution to fly my country for ever; and, attracted by the fame of your greatness, I have braved danger in every shape to reach your kingdom. There, at least, said I to myself, my eyes will not be for ever offended by the sight of men as lean and as straight as poplars."

"Stop," interrupted the King, "Are the poplar trees, then, straight in your country?"

"Alas! sire; yes—as straight as—" and Hop-o'-my-

Thumb looked round for some object of comparison; but all was humpy, crooked, misshapen. Suddenly he caught sight of the King's Fool, who had run up straight as a lily; and for this reason, he was an object of numberless pleasantries among the courtiers.

"Straight as that little monster there," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb off-hand, pointing to the fool.

The whole court laughed heartily at this little joke, which his Majesty was graciously pleased to pronounce an excellent one, and order its insertion, by the Lord Treasurer of Jokes, in the Royal Joe Miller, which was as carefully preserved as the Doom's-day Book of the Kingdom, in an oaken box, bound with gold clasps.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb drew a long breath, and went on.

"More," said I to myself, "my eyes will repose themselves agreeably on a world of gracefully rounded humps. There I shall feel myself, really, in the midst of brothers. Nor have my fond hopes deceived me. What a pleasing spectacle," said he, impudently throwing his eyes around, "where every back is arched, bowed, and twisted!"

At these flattering words, all the humps became excited, lifted themselves up, and rounded themselves off in their handsomest style, just like a troop of cats setting their backs up.

Our malicious hero, after this and several other fine speeches, was considered to be so handsome, witty, and clever, that the King named him, on the spot, Grand Chamberlain of his own Palace, and Inspector General of all the Humps in the Kingdom. The duties of these important offices were discharged by the young Hunchback with much conscientiousness and public spirit. He set a mark upon all bad-shaped hunchbacks, and ordered the little ones to be heartily flogged to make them grow bigger. He even pushed his rigour so far, the graceless rogue, as to exercise a merciless severity against false humps. By degrees his pride got the better of his discretion; and while engaged thus in unmasking the false hunchbacks, he every day increased the size of his own, to such an extent that their growth could actually be seen. This vanity was his destruction; for the courtiers, who were

growing jealous of the unusual favour enjoyed by this foreigner, remarked the extraordinary increase of his protuberances, and made it a general subject of conversation at their private parties. Yet no one dared openly to charge him with forgery—until, to aggravate his troubles, with the airs and graces he displayed, and his wheedling manner and funny ways, he made the King's daughter fall violently in love with him. Poor girl! when she saw his back get up and grow more and more round, she thought him the handsomest gentleman about the whole court. Her passion grew with his humps; and at last, unable to control her feelings, and having always been humoured by her father, who bought her everything she asked for—as is the happy custom with royal daughters, and indeed almost all others—she summoned up courage to avow her passion to his Majesty.

Charmed at having a son-in-law of such wonderful talent and extraordinary beauty, the royal father gave his consent to the union; and to the internal horror of Hop-o'-my-Thumb—though greatly to the gratification of his pride, and the general dissatisfaction of his envious short-humped rivals in the court—an early day was fixed for their nuptials.

When the proposed union was first brought under the notice of the sham hunchback, he was seized with a shocking sickness and felt ready to drop. It was not at all a position he aimed at; first, because he did not feel it at all his duty to wed that ugly little Pussy (for such, we are sorry to say, was the uncourteous title he applied to the Princess Royal); and, secondly, because, as he should be obliged to sleep with his wife, that royal fair would infallibly discover the trick he had put upon her in the shape of his false hump. Thus the cheat that had been such a joke, as he thought, became a source of cruel misery to him; and, like all those who do wrong and are not found out, he felt the wrong brought with it its own punishment. He tried at first, by diminishing the height of his hump, to inspire an aversion in his royal betrothed. This was a circumstance that did not escape the notice of his enemies, ever on the watch, who soon ventured to

pronounce quite loudly the words "Hypocrite!" "Sham!" "False pretender!" "Humbug!" and the like; but these, the Grand Chamberlain speedily brought to reason, by generously distributing his favours among them, in the shape of twenty-five lashes to each of his slanderers.

Meanwhile, the wedding-day drew nigh. Hop-o'-my-Thumb had not found any expedient to avert so horrible a danger; and he well knew that, if found out, it was all over with him. At last the grand day actually arrived. The young bride had put on her most magnificent dress; and her betrothed could not but notice, that, by way of enhancing the power of her charms, she had coquettishly, and with much skill, enlarged her hump; he could not grudge her this little trickery at such a moment, flattering as was its motive to his own, or what should properly have been his own feelings. As for himself, he wore the grand costume of his office, and, to give himself a more majestic height and appearance, put on his seven-leagued boots.

The King, the Queen, and the Court, in grand procession, conducted the bridegroom and bride to the temple, where the marriage rites were to be performed. Now, it happened, as if to crown the miseries of this poor sham-hunchback, that one portion of the ceremonies of a marriage in this island, consisted of a special usage, which was, that the bride, in the presence of witnesses, should strike, with all her force, the most noble and most sensitive part of her future husband; that is to say, his hump. The blow thus inflicted, it is his duty to receive without complaint, as a proof that he is fully able to take his share in the necessary pains and troubles that belong to the married state; and, what is more, to return thanks to his bride, as giving her a pledge of his submission. Hop-o'-my-Thumb, extremely uncomfortable and worried, being quite aware of what he had to go through, awaited this moment in horrible anxiety. This moment arrived; whereupon the young princess, turning towards her betrothed, and gazing on him with eyes full of love and admiration, raised her hand, with a smile as she did so, and struck.

Instantly she uttered a loud scream! her hand had sunk in the hump, and she felt that it was wool.

"Horror!" she cried, and fainted.

Everybody rose up and hastened about her; nor was it long before they brought her to life. Her betrothed leant over her, feigning not to understand the cause of her terror. The humpees crowded together, knocked against one another, and mobbed each other, all the while saying, "Pray take care of my hump!" That of Hop-o'my-Thumb was in a greater state of disorder than all the others; but he felt nothing of it, and, thanks to the general trouble, no one took any notice of it. At last, the Princess being quite restored, every one wished her to tell the reason of her sudden fright. She, poor girl, broken-hearted and deceived Princess, could not utter a word; but turned her eyes, full of tears, upon her bridegroom, and all eyes were now directed to the same quarter.

His hump was in a state, indeed, pitiable; squeezed and pressed in the tumult, it had been beaten down in one place, and raised up in another; so that its surface, in place of its usual elegant roundness, presented a crowd of indentures, furrows, and heights; in fact, altogether and finally, a shocking disorder. The courtiers had thus far gazed, in a stupor of amazement, at the strange spectacle, without daring to say all they thought, while he himself, to impose upon them all, walked up and down with severe looks, until suddenly he felt a tug behind, and saw the Princess's lap-dog playfully pulling his hump to pieces, while an officer of the King's guards remarked a lock of wool hanging out of a rent which had been made in his dress during the tumult.

At the sight a cry of horror rose from all sides. The indignant King ordered his guards to seize the traitor; and they came up to lay hands on him. Our poor young husband, full of shame and sorely disquieted, was on the point of being taken, and certainly sent to death, when he remembered his Seven-Leagued Boots. They had been so long out of use, that he had, for the moment, forgotten all about them: but the imminent danger roused his faculties; he stretched out a leg, and it carried his foot seven leagues from the spot, while the dismayed guards seized the other boot, which slipped through their hands; and thus their prey escaped their clutches.

II.

We have now reached that portion of Hop-o'-my-Thumb's adventures with his Seven Leagued Boots, which refers to the Frozen Words.

It so happened that Hop-o'-my-Thumb, in his hurried departure from the Island of Hunchbacks, landed his foot on another island, whence he caught sight of some vessels on their voyage, and made use of them for the same purpose as he had done before. In this manner he came upon a continent, that he knew nothing about. His fears had been highly worked up, in spite of the distance that lay between him and all danger, he kept stepping along, on his way anywhere, just as if the guards of his illustrious and terrible father-in-law had been at his heels. He took no notice of anything about him, but went on at the chance direction of his feet, and the will of his Boots. Little by little, in the meanwhile, his feelings grew calmer. His spirits settled down, and he had almost thrown his troubles off his mind, as he entered a large town, to which he was completely a stranger. This was Timbuctoo, a very large city in the centre of Africa, which serves as the centre of the trade for all the Negro monarchies, the place whither the caravans of Negro, and sometimes, but very rarely, of Arab traders, carrying merchandise from Algiers, Morocco, the Nile, and the Niger, resort to interchange their goods. Large as this city is—for it contains three hundred thousand inhabitants—its houses are built of mud and straw only; and it is surrounded by low walls of mere mud, baked in the hot sun. To Hop-o'-my-Thumb's astonishment, he found his vaunted figure and beauty, and even his name and quality, of less avail here, than in the place he had just left; for though the inhabitants were not hunchbacks, they were, nevertheless, as black as coal; and all the clothes they wore, were a few large palm leaves sown together with twine, made from the bark of trees.

"I am very unlucky," thought Hop-o'-my-Thumb, "in never meeting any men like myself."

When the inhabitants of Timbuctoo saw such a queer little fellow entering their town in the grand costume of a

Chamberlain, with his white face, his front hump bedaubed with mire, and his back hump hanging in rags ; his head bare (he had lost his hat and feather in the fray) ; his hair dishevelled, and lastly, in large boots, that seemed to swallow up his little legs ; they took him for some fantastic creature, some unknown animal of the desert, and they set to hunting him down. So he saw there was nothing left, him but to decamp as fast as he could.

The desert lay before, in its wide and silent extent. He had to cross over its dry and burning sands, under a leaden sun. His humps of wool weighed him down ; the perspiration ran off him in heavy drops ; and it was with difficulty he could breathe. He halted, therefore, for a short time, to get rid of what had so lately constituted his beauty, preserving only his shirt and pantaloons.

"Off with humps and hunchbacks," said he, as he pitched away, as far as he could throw them, the two bundles of wool. "Ensigns of my grandeur, I lay you down without regret."

The fact is, that never did King take off his crown so gaily as did Hop-o'-my-Thumb his robes of Grand Chamberlain and Inspector General of Humps ; and feeling himself a great deal more at his ease, he immediately resumed his route. He stepped and he stepped a long time. By stepping along, we soon get over the road ; especially those who have also such marvellous boots to step along in. The leagues flew behind him with prodigious rapidity. By degrees, he felt the heat grow less : a few steps more and it began to be cold ; some steps further, and he found himself transported into the midst of a country covered with snow, without trees, without verdure, without inhabitants, and where an icy wind was blowing that penetrated to his very bones ; and he was in his shirt sleeves !

"Where are my humps," he, shivering, cried. "Give me back my humps — humps that I said to myself I should never regret more."

In fact, so cold was he, that he began to weep in spite of himself ; and the tears froze as they came out of his eyes. Even his breath was hardly out of his mouth, ere it seemed to be changed into ice.

"What do they call this dreadful country," said he to himself; "No house, no inhabitants. Where am I?"

At this moment, he caught sight of some fisherman, busied in breaking the ice, and went up to them, in hope of hearing where he was.

"What country is this?" he enquired. As the men seemed at first not to hear him, he repeated the question in a louder tone of voice; at which the fishermen raised their heads, but made no reply.

"Are you deaf?" cried he, with all his strength.

The fishermen looked at him and moved their lips, but not a single word came from their mouths.

"Do you hear me, or don't you hear me?" demanded Hop-o'-my-Thumb, angrily.

He went on putting questions to them, while the fishermen gazed at him as before, moving their lips, and putting their arms in motion, as if they were replying; but still without his being able to catch a word.

"I decidedly think they are making fun of me," said he to himself; "yet it may be that these dumb motions are the language of the country; but I don't understand it, and—" While speaking these words, in a high tone, he perceived his voice becoming smothered and less intelligible every moment; and it ended in his not being able any longer to hear himself speak, while his lips still kept moving on, though he could not catch the words. For a moment, he thought a sudden dumbness was afflicting him; but he soon observed, that in proportion as he spoke, there were formed about his face, little morsels of thin and transparent ice. At last, the purport of what was going on struck him. The words, hardly out of his lips, became frozen in the air, and being thus condensed into morsels of ice, they never reached so far as the ears.

Affrighted at such a prodigy—as well as shivering, frozen, and stiff with cold—he hastened to quit this deadly spot. For a moment, however, poor Hop-o'-my-Thumb was in a terrible agony of dismay; since, however disposed to depart from these snowy regions, he feared it was no longer in his power, as his Boots were so frozen to the soil, that he had no end of trouble in dragging them

away. At last, one violent pull, and he was able to detach his foot from the earth, which clung so closely to it.

He wandered a long while from country to country without knowing what places he was passing over. His father, the charcoal-burner, as you can well suppose, had not taught him geography, and Hop-o'-my-Thumb was now very sorry for it, as he saw how useful such knowledge would have been at this moment; since he had to continue on his journey entirely by chance; leaping over mountains; striding across ravines, rivers, and floods; traversing forests; visiting unknown peoples; passing and repassing the same places, without knowing, in a word, where he was, nor where he arrived, nor whither he was going.

One day, feeling very tired, he laid himself down on the shore of a sea to repose for a short time, and found he was again in that place where he had suffered so much from the cold. At that moment, however, it was spring time there; the ice and the snow were melting on all sides, and the gentle warmth of the sun lulled him to sleep. Our young traveller yielded to this happy impulse and went to sleep. But he was quickly awakened by the sound of voices; you would have said that numbers of men were speaking together. He gazed about him and saw no one; so he imagined that he had deceived himself, and mistaken the murmuring of the waves for the voices of men; whereupon he again returned to his sandy bed, and settled himself to sleep. But the noise began again, and the voices became more distinct.

"How cold it is!" said some one.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb looked about to find out who had uttered these words, but no one was there. He was surprised, also, that any one should talk about its being cold under such a fine sun. The same voice went on.

"Strike harder, then, on the ice," said one, "that will warm you."

"How cold it is—oh! how cold it is," said the first voice again.

"Well," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb to himself, "they must

be fools to find it cold to-day. Who are you, then, you rascals?" he shouted with all his force.

But the conversation went on as if the speakers had not heard him. More and more astonished, he looked about on all sides for the men whose voices could be heard so clearly and distinctly. All was desert: and yet these words sounded close to him, at his very ears, as if he were standing in the midst of a group of men conversing, without troubling themselves about his presence. He heard on his right, "Good morning; how do you do?"

He turned quickly to this side; but while he was looking on the right, an invisible talker would answer on the left.

"Tolerably well; how are you?"

And always some one near him; and the conversation went on regularly; and the people were always complaining of the cold. He rubbed his eyes to assure himself that he was awake; "I certainly am not dreaming," he said to himself, with some feeling of uneasiness. But his wonder increased still more, when he soon recognised his own voice, as a party in this mysterious conversation.

"What is the name of this country?" it said.

"Speak louder," answered some one.

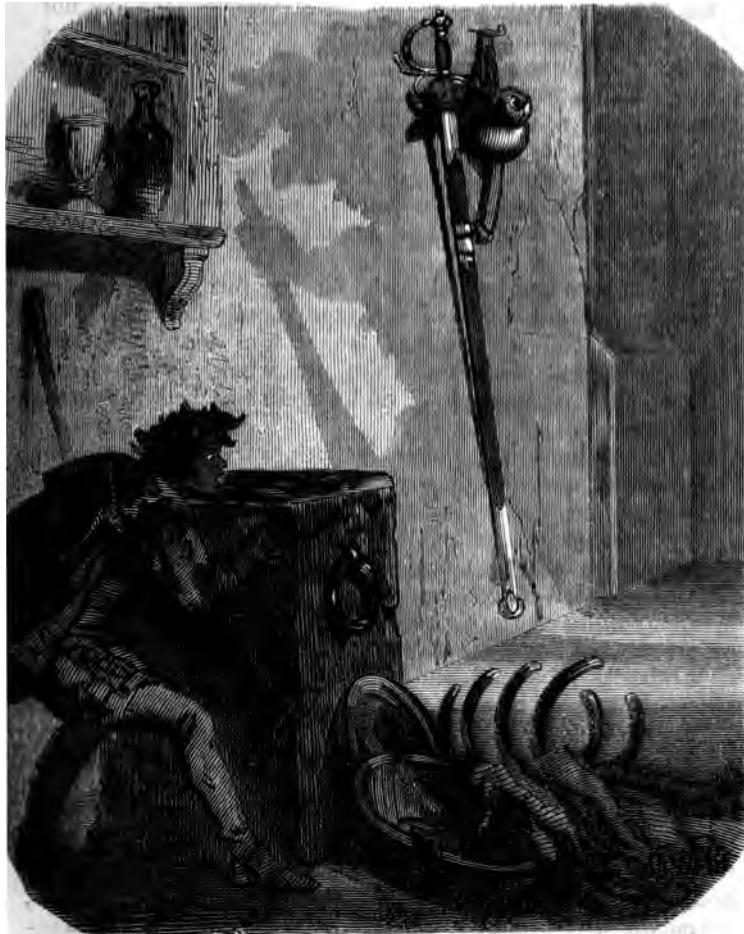
"Are you deaf," went on his own voice.

Then, after a short silence, this same voice, his own still, seemed to be talking to itself, and said,

"I decidedly think they are making fun of me; unless these dumb motions be the language of the country."

At these words, his memory woke up; and he recalled his having, in fact, used these same words, in the same place, during that hard winter, when his breath froze in the air. At the present time, the sun caused everything to melt; snow, ice, breath, and words. The invisible conversation, then, was nothing else but the words that had been frozen in the winter, ran loose from the frosty chains and again sounding near him. Having thus, at last, got at the explanation of the prodigy, he was highly amused, hearing in April words uttered in January; and he listened for a long time to this discourse, whence he got hold of

many comical things, and even surprised some important secrets. The questions crossed one another in the air,



and the answers often came where they were not intended. Sometimes a voice would say,

"Would you like to have a warming?"

Another would reply,

"Yes, with a cod's tail."

This one would say,

"Make haste, then, stupid."

The other would answer,

"Thank you, I am not at all cold."

"What a strange country," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, laughing ready to crack his sides.

But it is time to be off: and away we start on the wonderful, terrible, serio-comical, and, we are sorry to say, final adventure of **A GAME AT BARS BETWEEN THE GREAT MEN.**

Our hero had lost all taste for any further adventures, and given up his idea of a voyage round the world. The unfrozen conversation had taught him that he was in Siberia: but that made him no wiser, owing to his ignorance of geography. So he again resumed his march at random.

After devouring many leagues, surveying numerous countries, and seeing many extraordinary things—to which, we are sorry to say, from the unprepared state of his mind by previous education, he paid very little attention—he arrived by night on the verge of a great forest, near to which a kind of castle elevated itself. Here he made up his mind to receive a repast for hospitality. The gates stood open, and there was no one within. But it was evidently inhabited, and the owners were not far off, as would be seen by a log still burning on the kitchen-hearth. By the dull light of this meagre fire, Hop-o'-my-Thumb took a minute survey of the chamber in which he found himself. It seemed to him as if the house was not quite strange to him. But where he could have seen it before, he could not call to mind. In other respects, his examination was not of a very exacting character: for he saw on the walls traces of blood, and sabres: and, moreover, carbasses suspended from nails upon them. On the pavement bones could be distinctly seen, that had been thrown down pell-mell; and these had the appearance of having belonged to human beings. At one blow the recollection

came back to him ; he groaned audibly, as he recognised the castle of that very Ogre, to whom, of old, he had done such a very bad turn.

“ Oh heaven !” he exclaimed, “ whither have I thrust in. Let us hasten to fly ; better the forest and the night, better the rain and the snow, than this accursed mansion !”

He turned his steps, without loss of time, towards the door ; but, when just on the point of reaching it, he saw, in the dim light, on the threshold, the terrible shadow of the Ogre, who was just coming in with his wife. Hop-o'-my-Thumb had only just time to squat him down behind the trunk of a great oak, sawn in two pieces, the block on which the eater of human flesh despatched his victims ; and there he waited until the ogre entered, hoping to steal away, by favour of the darkness.

But the Ogre locked the door with a key, and put the key in his pocket.

Behold, then, our hero fastened in with his most deadly enemy, in great uneasiness, hardly able to draw his breath, and shaking with fear. Yet Hop-o'-my-Thumb took courage, from the very difficulty of his position, and still hoped.

“ As soon as I hear the Ogre snore,” said he to himself, “ I shall escape by the window, as I did last time.”

But just as it happened before, the horrible devourer of children scented his victim in his hiding-place ; and, as before, he repeated many times his terrible

“ Fee faw fum, I smell fresh meat.

However, whether he had drunk a little too much of blood, while out with his wife, or whether his scent had grown dull with age, he was a long time looking for his victim, without being able to put his nose upon him. For a moment, he even thought it might be some child wandering about near the castle, and opened the door and stood upon the sill, sniffing the air from outside. Hop-o'-my-Thumb, seeing the favourable moment, came softly out of his hiding-place, and, thanks to his littleness, slipped like a rat between the Ogre’s legs. Just at the moment, the Ogre

was coming in without having seen anything ; and Hop-o'-my-Thumb had already one foot outside, when, in pushing the door, his hideous enemy became aware of some obstacle that hindered his closing it. He stooped down, and, feeling in the dark, found the unfortunate Hop-o'-my-Thumb, one of whose feet had been caught between the door and the sill.



The ferocious man-eater uttered a cry of joy on feeling that it was a human creature struggling under his hand.



"Good!" said he, "here is something for supper. Wife, light a candle and give me my large knife. I have caught this bird on the wing."



His wife lighted a candle, and brought him his great knife.

"Let us see if he is fat," said the frightful man, bringing the poor little fellow close up to the candle. "Eh! butz," added he, as he ran his eye over Hop-o'-my-Thumb, "it seems to me I have seen you before. Yes, it is you, you little rascal, who stole my boots, and were the cause of my killing my seven dear little daughters. Ah! good-for-nothing—you will now have to pay that score to me: this time you shall not escape me."

He applied himself to sharpening his knife, regarding his victim all the while with a horrible grin of malicious satisfaction and bloodthirsty revenge. On a sudden he recognised his boots!

"Ah! I see them," he exclaimed, seizing hold of Hop-o'-my-Thumb, whom he unbooted with one twist of his hand.



"My dear Boots!" said he, as he took them; "once more then I have got you! Here you are back again! Let us look awhile, and see to what kind of state this little thief has brought you." And he began to turn the boots over and over, as he curiously examined them. He looked over at the seams; he pressed the legs; he held them to his bosom; all this, without forgetting his victim; who, standing at his side, awaited his punishment, all the while asking himself if there were yet any means of escape.

Have you ever seen a cat that has just caught a mouse? She gives it just a slight bite, then lays it down on the ground, and makes a pretence of forgetting it, and even turns her head aside, winking her eyes all the while, to give the poor beast false confidence. But the mouse, who has been brought up not to place very great faith in a cat's clemency, makes belief, on its own part, to be dead, and

peeps from the corner of its eye, to see if its enemy be looking, waiting some moment of inattention on the part of its executioner, to make its escape.

This was exactly the situation of our two personages—the cat being the Ogre, the mouse Hop-o'-my-Thumb. The mouse at first did not move a step; but it soon remarked how the cat's attention was drawn off from it. Then it hazarded one very timid step, dropping its eyelids, as it did so; next, seeing that it had not been noticed, it made a second step, a little wider, still watching from the corner of its eye, the terrible Raminagobis. Seeing that he was not noticing anything, it made another step, that took it almost out of the sight of its enemy, still occupied in examining his dear boots. At last, seeing the door wide open, the mouse made a rush outside, while the cat, hearing the noise, ran after it. Once escaped from the claws and den of his enemy, Hop-o'my-Thumb profited by the darkness, and ran to hide himself under a bush, at some distance. The Ogre came out raging, and searched everywhere.

"He shall not escape," he exclaimed; "I will find him, if I search for him all night. But he is so little," he added, as he turned his eyes in every direction, "that it is like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay."

He tried to sniff him in the air; but, as there was, luckily, a mist rising, the scent did not lie. At last, he went in to his family, and Hop-o'-my-Thumb heard him there, to his great delight, quarrelling with his wife, who scolded him for his imprudence. He gave her a sound thrashing, and sent her off howling to bed, at which Hop-o'-my-Thumb grinned and rubbed his hands. After that the Ogre sat down by the kitchen fire, that was almost out, to pick a dry bone, and console himself with the thought that he should be able, next morning, with his Seven-leagued Boots, soon to catch his mouse once more.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb lost no time in flying in the direction of the forest, where he awaited the approach of day. With the earliest dawn, out stepped the Ogre, running after him, and coursing over the forest on every side. Sometimes he would pass by the side of the very bush where his vic-

tim was squatting like a hare, motionless and listening; at other times, Hop-o'-my-Thumb could hear over his head the voice of the redoubtable bandit growling, like thunder, and giving vent to abominable oaths. He never went home until nightfall. Hop-o'-my-Thumb dared not again venture out upon the plain, where he would have been seen, and soon caught. But "hunger," as the proverb says, "will drive the wolf out of the wood;" and so it drove out poor Hop-o'-my-Thumb. He slipped down, without being seen, to the bottom of a valley; he contrived to gain the summit of it, and was getting ready to cross it, and descend on the other side, where he would have been hidden by the eminence, when he caught sight of the Ogre, just upon the verge of the forest, passing his eyes over it on all sides. Instantly he dropped down under the side of a rock; but he knew too well that he could not remain there long, and that he must infallibly be discovered. Whereupon, aroused by the imminence and greatness of his peril, he sought, in his fertile imagination, a means of getting out of this new and terrible difficulty. After a full quarter of an hour's reflection, at the end of which he tapped his forehead, as if, at last, he had got an idea, his plan was formed, and he put it into execution at once.

He stepped out from behind the rock; and, in place of concealing himself, climbed on the summit of it, where he stood bravely, with his hands crossed, visible from all sides, and waited.

The Ogre was then about three leagues off, scanning with his eyes the plain that extended itself before him. Suddenly he caught sight of his enemy on the top of the rock, and his eyes sparkled with ferocious joy.

"Ah, I see you, at last, you wicked joker, and I have got you." So he stretched out his left leg at once; and, of course, as he had his Boot on that leg, it started off, and raced itself down at seven leagues' distance from the Ogre, that is to say, at four leagues from the rock on which Hop-o'-my-Thumb was standing. The Ogre turned back at once, somewhat sufficiently astonished; then running in a contrary direction, he made a fresh step of

seven leagues, which brought him three leagues on this side of the rock. He began again, as at the first time; and, as at the first, found himself four leagues from his point. He came back, and was again three leagues off. He kept up this little exercise for a quarter of an hour, and always with the same result. In fact, the Boots would regularly do their seven leagues, neither more nor less, in such a fashion, that he must be alternately beyond or behind the rock, but never on the rock itself. This, then, was Hop-o'-my-Thumb's object, in posting himself three leagues from his enemy, and this was what the huge beast of a giant had not foreseen. Tricked in his attempt, not knowing how to take it, he endeavoured to attack his enemy on the flank. He went to the right, he went to the left, he came back again, and twisted towards his point, but without the power of attaining to it. He looked like some tiger roving round an iron cage in which a lamb is enclosed. Every moment his fury increased, as he felt his want of power; and, what topped all, was the sight of Hop-o'-my-Thumb, sitting tranquilly on his rock, with his thumb to his nose, and his fingers stretched out, telling him what is vulgarly called "to take a sight." Powerless, yet furious, the Ogre struck the earth with his foot, rushed hither and thither, like one distracted, but always with the same result. What made matters worse, was, that as the Boots, which had not been worn for a long time by any one but Hop-o'-my-Thumb, had naturally shrunk, so they pinched the Ogre's big feet like a vice. In this condition, his rage found relief, at last, in tears, as he sat down in a state of thorough exhaustion, to think over some means of catching his enemy, whom he looked upon a poor wretch, but who had more sense in his little half-pint head, than the Ogre in the whole hogshead of his huge carcass. After a long consideration, the Giant fancied he had found out the way to catch his sharp little enemy.

"Now, what a blundering fool I have been (this was nearer the truth than he suspected): instead of putting on these Seven-leagued Boots, I have only to walk at my ordinary pace, and I should soon have caught him up."

In fact, it wanted three steps, or more, of Hop-o'-my-Thumb's to equal one of the Ogre's. The Giant took off his boots, and, carrying them in his hand, set off in pursuit of his slippery little victim. At first the poor youth made an effort to escape by running, but he lost ground every instant, and saw clearly that running was quite useless. He, therefore, came to a dead halt, and awaited the Giant's coming up, as if resigned to his fate. The Man-eater neared him steadily, seized him, and threw him on his back, swearing, that, on this same evening, he would make a feast off his flesh. Meanwhile, as the running backwards and forwards had quite tired him out, making his feet sore, the Ogre sat himself down awhile, placed his victim by his side, and, by way of revenge for the tricks he had played him, began to jibe and joke him with some atrocious pleasantries.

"Tell me, my fine young friend," said he; "which is the finest cut in your body? Is it your liver or your cutlets? Come, now; with what part shall we begin our feast tonight? I should like to reserve the tit-bit for my dessert. Now then; give us an answer!"

"Wait awhile," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb; "I am a better fellow than you, at any rate, big as you are. You going to kill me; and, as for me, I am going to render a service."

"Ah! What?"

"Your left foot is all over blood, and I know why."

"Because, my merry little fellow, you let my shrivel up."

"No; it is because at the bottom of the left ~~bone~~ is a flint, which stuck in there as I was growing."

Omen who took

"Yes, yes; joke away, you ugly monster," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb to himself; "we shall see directly who will look the biggest fool in the end."

During this conversation, the Ogre had thrust his arm into the leg of the boot, to draw out the flint-stone, but his huge hand could not squeeze itself down to the bottom, it was too big and too broad.

"Here, do you take it," said he to Hop-o'-my-Thumb, passing the boot over to him. "Get the stone out, as you have a smaller hand than I have."

"No."

"How is this? No! Take out the stone, I tell you, or I will kill you this instant!"

"Whether I am killed now, or at half-past six in the evening, is equally the same to me."

This retort set the Ogre thinking; in fact, he saw that there was nothing to gain by threatening an unfortunate, upon whom sentence of death had already been passed.

"Well, then," said he; "I grant you your life, if you do me this service. I hope that bargain will suit your market."

"Give me your word of honour;" said Hop-o'-my-Thumb.

"On the faith of an Ogre, I swear it! Capital!" added he in his own mind. "That does not cost much; as soon as the stone is withdrawn, I pick you up, my pretty lamb; and this evening I gobble you up, and crunch your nice little bones."

"A bargain," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, holding out his hand for the boot. "Very fine," added he, on his side; "you fancy, you ferocious beast, that I put trust in your word. I am not quite such a fool. Wait awhile, Master Ogre!"

And now see how our little hero thrusts his short hand into the immense leg of the boot, and digs, digs into it on all sides. But as they were seated on the brink of the valley, where the land was on a slope, the Boot slipped away under the pressure of his hand; or, rather, he contrived that it should slip, and it went little by little before him, so cleverly, that, at the end of a moment, he was three or four steps away from the Ogre.

"Have you quite done it," said that party.

"Yes," replied Hop-o'-my-Thumb, as he cleverly thrust his leg into the boot. "Now just run after me," he added; "I am going to stretch my legs a little," as he got up and put forth the one with the boot on it.

"Ah!" you little wretch," shouted the enraged Ogre; "you have cheated me again; but I shall catch you yet, for all that."

He hurried to put on the boot that still remained to him, but during this time Hop-o'-my-Thumb had taken about three steps; so giving himself one-and-twenty leagues in advance. But he soon thought of a circumstance that altered his plan of escape. Since each of them had one boot, they made each, one step of seven leagues, and one of their ordinary stretch. According to calculation, therefore, the Ogre, as having much longer legs, would make the second step much wider than Hop-o'-my-Thumb, and must, as a matter of course, infallibly come up with the poor little marcher, in spite of the advance he had gained. Hop-o'-my-Thumb, therefore, had to think of some other expedient. Instead of running away, he stopped short, turned round, came back, and waited for his enemy. The Ogre came running up at a great pace; but when he saw Hop-o'-my-Thumb halt and turn towards him, he suspected some new manœuvre, and halted likewise. "What does this mean?" said he to himself: "the little rascal wants to play me another of his tricks; yet, what can he do?"

It was fine to see the Giant looking for poor Hop-o'-my-Thumb's tricks in his own fat and foolish head; but he found nothing there. Meanwhile, the two stood as they were, without either moving, at seven leagues' distance from each other, each waiting to see what the other would do. At last the Ogre, at all risks, stretched out his leg with the boot on towards his enemy: and as soon as Hop-o'-my-Thumb saw him lift his foot, he did the same on his side, and stretched forth his boot in the direction of his adversary. Then each of them, having made a step, came back, and found themselves still opposite to each other, at the same distance as before, that is to say, seven leagues; with this difference only, that the Ogre was in



Hop-o'-my-Thumb's place, and Hop-o'-my-Thumb in the Ogre's. The latter worthy, astonished at a result so unexpected, made another effort to march upon Hop-o'-my-Thumb, who hastened to march towards him; so that each recovered his original position. Thus they crossed each other but never touched.

"Hold!" said the Ogre, "I never thought of this."

Hop-o'-my-Thumb, all the while, laughing and enjoying the success of his stratagem.

The Giant, unable to make out why he could not do what he wanted, renewed his attempts and began again several times; so that they crossed each other, over and over again, just like players at Bars. Hop-o'-my-Thumb took advantage of this to say to the Ogre as they passed.

"Good morning, you great stupid!"

The Ogre grew very angry, ground his teeth, and went on for the twentieth time at his useless exercise.

This "cross-hands" might have lasted a long time, had not Hop-o'-my-Thumb brought it to an end. Just as he passed near the Ogre, he said to him:

"I will give you back your Boot."

The Ogre repassed and said:

"Give it me."

Hop-o'-my-Thumb, crossing again, responded:

"On one condition."

"What is that?" said the Ogre, in returning.

In this way, they came at last to an understanding, by dropping a few words at the point where they crossed, between their seven-league steps. The conditions proposed by Hop-o'-my-Thumb were to the following purport:

Each was to take off his boot, hold it in his hand, and so approach to within twenty-five paces of the other, to lay down the boot at that distance, and then each to go from it to his own side. The Ogre was to take up his Boot, as soon as his adversary was out of sight.

The Giant accepted these conditions of Hop-o'-my-Thumb's; but added one other of his own. He proposed to tie the two Boots together, when they had been laid down, by means of a cord, the end of which he was to throw over to Hop-o'-my-Thumb. This, as he said, was to make more sure of recovering them.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb, aware that the Ogre meant mischief, hesitated before agreeing to this proposal, and asked himself what reason the other could have for wishing to tie the Boots together at that distance.

"Oh! I have it now," said he to himself, at last. "He wants to drag off my boot with his rope at once, as soon as I have fastened it; and as he is much stronger than I am, I should have a nice job to keep it back: he would drag me along with it. That is capital. I will now play the game out with you in my own fashion, Mr. Cheater."

So he agreed to the Ogre's condition. Each took off his boot, and set forward on the march to approach nearer to the other. It took them three hours' hard walking, before they could come up to the required distance of twenty-five paces. There they halted as had been mutually agreed. The Ogre then drew from his pocket a large rope, fastened one end of it to his own boot, and tied the other to a stone, which he threw over to Hop-o'-my-Thumb. The latter picked up the end, and pretended to tie it to the Boot; but in place of knotting it, he rolled it tightly round his own right hand, and then lifted up the boot with this hand, to make the Ogre believe that it was attached to the rope.

"Is it all done?" said the Ogre.

"Yes," replied Hop-o'-my-Thumb; "we can now depart."

"Not quite yet, my little man!" said the Ogre, bursting into a laugh, as he pulled away at the cord with all his strength. "You did not expect this, my cherub."

"I assure you, I did," said Hop-o'-my-Thumb, to himself; "but you now, you hardly expect what I have got ready for you!"

He held upon the rope with all his power; but being less heavy, and less strong than his adversary, he was almost dragged away; and was soon within three steps of the Ogre; when he stuck his foot against a large stone, and offered a most vigorous resistance, the Ogre gave a violent pull, upon which Hop-o'-my-Thumb, with a grin, suddenly let the rope go, and the Giant fell, rolling six steps from him, his legs in the air, and his head on the earth.

Hop-o'-my-Thumb lost no time. While the Ogre, stunned by the fall, was rising from the ground painful and groaning, he stepped into both the Boots, cut the rope, and made off, shouting out to his wonder-stricken and stupefied enemy.

"I will tell you something to comfort you; this is the last trick I shall ever play you. As for the Boots, you must come and fetch them."

Before the Ogre could recover his legs, Hop-o'-my-Thumb was thirty-five leagues from the spot; and as he knew these parts, from having been there before with his brothers, when they lost themselves, he was able to find his way back home speedily.

Once in there again, he renounced all further adventures; and for fear a taste for them should revive in his mind at any future time, he went into the forest at night and buried his Seven-league Boots where he could never know the place so as to find them again.

A great number of clever persons have searched for, but no one has been able to find again these Seven-league Boots; so you, my young readers, must, for the present, rest content in your travels with the railway train, and its seventy miles an hour.

THE PRINCESS WITH THE GOOSE'S FEET.

I.

THE CHOICE OF A HUSBAND.

THERE reigned once, in the Kingdom of the Fertile Mountains, a queen whose beauty was the talk of all neighbouring lands. This Queen, who was a widow, and sole mistress of a great kingdom, had, for all that, suffered the mortification of seeing many sovereigns recoil from the honour of an alliance with her. This was because that, in spite of her acknowledged beauty and intelligence, her

majesty had one great fault, which menaced the future misery of the members of her family. She was horribly passionate : the least resistance to her will became the subject of a frightful scene, during which her majesty, setting no bounds to her royal fury, seized the first object that came to hand, and hurled it at the head of any one who ventured to resist her. It was thus that her Lord High Chancellor, a venerable nobleman of sixty years, was struck on the forehead with a large china jar, which, luckily, only grazed him slightly, and fell in shivers at his feet.

These little affairs over, the Queen regretted them bitterly ; she condemned herself for letting temper get the better of her ; she wept and tore her hair ; was prodigal of her gold, her tears, and her efforts to repair the mischief done by her violent outbreaks. Eight days afterwards she went on in the same way again.

These frequent attacks of passion obtained her the name of The Peony, for she used to grow as red as one of those large flowers, in her fits of rage.

Now, as this Queen was a widow, and also without children, her people had a lively desire she should marry, and give an heir to the throne. This general wish of the nation, the great lords of the kingdom, assembled in solemn conclave, enforced by an earnest and unanimous supplication, that her majesty would make choice of a husband.

The Queen, who would have wanted no pressing to unite herself with King Leones, the sovereign of the Isles of Gold, a prince whose personal advantages were every-where highly spoken of, when she learnt that this monarch had asked, in marriage, the hand of the Princess Amandine, who ruled over a petty principality of no importance,—felt herself offended, and determined to show him that she could find a husband much handsomer, and a better made man than himself.

She replied, therefore, to the address of the Peers, that she was not disposed to give herself a master by marrying any foreign king ; but that, for the satisfaction of her people, she would deign to choose, from the gentlemen of

her kingdom, some one whom she was willing to raise to the throne ; that they were to assemble on a certain day appointed, and she would then name the happy object of her royal choice.

The grandees withdrew, in high satisfaction at a speech which gave each of them the hope of sharing a crown. They felicitated her majesty on the wisdom of her plan, while her more humble subjects, whom such a resolution delighted, testified their joy by fireworks and brilliant illuminations.

The cousin-german of the late king, being the proprietor of nearly a quarter of the kingdom, and of enormous wealth, was, naturally, the one whom all supposed destined to marry their Queen. Courtiers and flatterers crowded to his palace, wishing him joy, and asking favours as if he were already the Queen's husband.

The Prince Myrtil received them all with a protecting goodness, and a kind of mysterious modesty, that plainly testified his secret hopes.

At last the great day arrived ; the Queen, seated on a throne of sky-blue velvet, embroidered with pearls, held in her hand a sceptre of gold, enriched with precious stones. All the gentlemen of the kingdom—all those, at least, who had been able to prove their title to nobility, were assembled in the throne-room, waiting the moment that was to decide their fate, every one cherishing in his heart a little grain of hope on his own account.

There might be seen the sage chancellor of the kingdom, whose head had grown white in the royal service ; the prime minister, who had ruled, for six years, with prudence and loyalty ; the grand chamberlain, a young, vain man, who thought that his recent nomination as grand chamberlain, was only the prelude to favours of a much higher character. Among them was remarked the Prince Myrtil, bearing proudly emblazoned on his doublet of cherry-coloured satin the arms of the royal house, and regarding the crowd of courtiers with a mixture of pride and patronage.

The wise councillors of the Queen went to her, before the opening of the sitting, with a petition to make choice

of Prince Myrtile, whose wealth would be advantageous to the state, and whose rank rendered him, in every respect; worthy to fix her eyes on. The Queen Peony replied to them, that she quite well knew what it was she had to do, adding, in a dry tone, that she could get along very well without their advice.

A short time before the assembling of the lords, the arrival at the court had been noticed of a gentleman of small fortune, and of the lower order of nobility, but who was so remarkably handsome as to attract every one's admiration.

This gentleman, who was named Handsome Tremenor, was not long in winning the Queen's favour; and, thanks to his elegant flatteries, quickly gained great power over her mind. The royal ministers watched these manœuvres of "Handsome Tremenor" with a good deal of uneasiness, and his known influence over her majesty was a source of serious discomfort to all of them, as the moment drew near in which the queen was to make a choice so important to the future interests of the kingdom.

On her majesty taking her seat a deep silence fell upon the assembly.

She ran her eyes for some time over all that brilliant nobility. The "Handsome Tremenor" stood out amongst all the lords radiant in extraordinary beauty, and dressed in violet-coloured velvet, with puffs of white satin embroidered in gold. The queen rose up.

"My lords," she said, "he whom I have chosen for my husband has already distinguished himself in my army by his courage, and in my councils by his prudence. Let him approach. It is my will that you this day salute him as your King. Advance, my Lord Tremenor, it is with you I have resolved to share the government of my kingdom."

The Handsome Tremenor stepped forward, radiant with pride and joy. Kneeling before the Queen, he received the sceptre from her hands, which he carried to his lips.

"Ah, madam!" he exclaimed, "I am unworthy so great a favour, and have little experience for the government of so vast a kingdom; but I see here those wise

ministers of the state, who, I venture to hope, will aid me with their advice, so enabling me to sustain, in a manner worthy of your majesty, the glory of that crown which your generosity has designed to accord to me."

The members of the Council, who had been scarcely able to conceal their discontent at the name of Tremenor, were immediately bound to his cause by the adroit speech. The Queen rewarded him with a gracious smile, and motioned him to take his place by her side, when all the other gentlemen, though filled from their high hopes, being still desirous to preserve the royal favor, cried out, "Long live the King!" with great enthusiasm.

Prince Mervil alone stood silent, then bowing coldly to the queen, withdrew from the presence.

II.

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS.

At the close of a magnificent ball given in honor of the event we have described above, the queen retired to her own apartments. Scarcely was she seated, and before she had time to take off the royal jewels and diamonds, when the door opened without noise, and by the uncertain glimmer of the lamp, which had almost burned out from the extreme lameness of the body, she saw before her an aged man of vast stature, clothed in a white woman's robe, over which flourished a long vine broid.

"Listen, O Queen, to me!" he cried. "I know your brother, who was my grandchild, always to be your companion, and in moments of difficulty to come to you, and with my advice. You are young and innocent of great skill. I would see what you will do yet there. Many but the man you have chosen; he is unfit to govern; he is fit none well and none; he will bring misery on you and your people. Choose rather among your noblemen, the wise Favers, or the brave Oberl, neither which prefers the Prince Mervil, who is of royal rank, but do not do me wrong by preferring an unknobbed, heedless youth whom you like little rules. You have allowed yourself to be seduced by empty beauty, without considering whether he who possesses it be worthy your regard."



The Queen, who had listened with impatience to these words of the old man, rose up impetuously.

"Who are you?" she cried, "that you should come here, in my apartments, and speak to me with such boldness? How did you get in? Who has allowed you to pass? I will send him away this instant; I would turn you out myself, if it were not from respect for your grey hairs."

"Madam," replied the aged man, without emotion, and preserving all the time the same gentle gravity, "I am the OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN. It is from regard to the wishes of your mother that I warn you at this moment of danger. Reflect, madam; take time to consider, that is all I ask of you, and I ask it in the name of your mother!"

Thus saying, the OLD MAN vanished without Queen Peony being able to tell how he had gone away.

She ran instantly to the gates of the palace, and asked all the guards if they had seen an old man with a long beard; but not one of them had any knowledge of such a person.

"Very well," said the Queen; "if any of you should see him, I give you orders absolutely to prevent him entering; and whoever infringes this order, shall be dismissed."

The marriage of the Queen was fixed for eight days after that on which she had chosen her husband.

On the third, after a grand party, while the Queen was alone, her attendants having left her, she heard a slight noise, just as she was dropping off to sleep, and the OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN again appeared before her.

"Reflect, madam, reflect," said he; "there are still a few days left you."

"How dare you show your face here! Have I not prohibited your coming in? Wretch! This insolence shall not escape punishment."

And seizing the bell-rope, she loudly called out for her women and her guards.

But when they rushed in, the Queen was struck dumb at not seeing the Old Man anywhere.

"They have, after all, let that Old Man enter!" exclaimed the Queen in a fury; "Who was on guard at the gates? Let them be instantly thrown into prison."

"No one has set eyes on such a man," replied one of her gentlemen who had entered; "no old man has even offered to enter. Your Majesty must have seen him in a dream."

"No, no!" repeated the Queen; "he was really here. How he went out I cannot comprehend; this Old Man must be some evil genius fated to persecute me. Go," she added, "I pardon those who were on guard at the gates; but keep a better watch for the future."

The day for the wedding at last arrived. The Queen—all one sparkle of diamonds, in a long robe of pink satin and cloth of silver—was just clasping a bracelet of rubies on her arm; when, for the third time, the OLD MAN of the Mountain appeared before her.

The Queen was about to speak, when a gesture from the OLD MAN closed her mouth. So majestic was the bearing of this OLD MAN, that it seemed to awe even the Queen.

"Madam," said he, "in an hour all will be over, and regrets will be useless. Break off, then, I implore you, such a union even at this moment; for unless you do, misfortune is close at hand."

"No!" replied the Queen, "cease from thus importuning me: I have made up my mind to marry the Lord Tremenor, and were you the King of the Genii himself, you should not change my resolve."

"I am not the King of the Genii, Madam; but an old man, whom long experience has taught that external advantages are often deceptive, and that the weakness of a husband, and a king, open the door to all kinds of misfortune. Since you are so obstinate, I give up entreating you to renounce your project; but if ever you stand in need of me, remember the OLD MAN of the Mountain; you will find me at the summit of the Black Crown." And with these words, the OLD MAN withdrew.

The Queen, slightly affected by these words of the OLD MAN, hastened into the gallery, where the court was assembled for the ceremony, so as to give herself no time for reflection.

The marriage was celebrated with much pomp; and Tremenor the Beau, became, thenceforward, Tremenor the King.

III.

THE MARRIAGE AND THE MISFORTUNE.

THE Queen was not slow in acknowledging the Old Man had been right; the handsome Tremenor, so humble, so flattering, so submissive, when aspiring to the hand of the Queen, soon showed such an arrogance and pride, as displeased every one, and of which her Majesty was the chief victim.

A year after their marriage, the nation learnt with joy that the Queen was about to have a baby.

King Tremenor announced to his wife that he had made choice of a godmother and guardian for the child; and she was a certain Fairy, who was the protectress of his family, and her name the Fairy Blanche.

But the Queen, who now recognised, too well, the wisdom of the Old Man of the Mountain, made answer to the King, that the child should be under the protection, not of the Fairy Blanche, but of the guardian of her mother, the Old Man of the Mountain.

"What do you mean by talking to me of the Old Man of the Mountain?" said the King; "I wish for my child a protection more powerful than that of an old dotard."

"The Old Man is a mighty Genius, Sire, whose advice I have been very foolish in not following," replied the Queen with bitterness; "he showed me the abyss, and I jumped into it with my eyes open. I am desirous to make amends for the offence I gave him; and I am sure that our child cannot fail to be happy with such support."

"Be that as it may, Madam; I have ordered the carriage, and I am going to the palace of the Fairy Blanche. If you don't wish to go with me, you are at perfect liberty to do otherwise. I can choose, myself, with her alone, what gifts she may best bestow on our child."

"I will go with you," answered the Queen, seeing that all resistance was useless.

A few minutes afterwards, the King and Queen entered their chariot, on their way to visit the Fairy Blanche. To reach her palace, which they could see in the distance, they had to traverse an immense park, which the Queen thought had a very strange appearance.

The trees in this park were entirely of a white color; under their white foliage, grew fruit, white and velvety; the flowers of every species were white. There were white verbenas, white heliotropes, geraniums, pansies, and lastly, roses and dahlias, that looked like flowers made of snow. The walks were gravelled with powdered silver. In the centre of the flower garden, was a great basin of mother of pearl, incrusted with opal, in which water sparkled perfumed and clear; the palace, built entirely of mother of pearl, with a roof of silver tiles, dazzled the eye with an incomparable brilliancy.

On alighting from her carriage, the Queen, after crossing a vestibule of carved ivory, with curtains of black satin, was ushered into a spacious saloon, hung with white moire antique, embroidered all over with fine pearls and opals, in the most elegant patterns. The cushions, which extended all round the saloon, were also embroidered with opals and pearls.

From the ceiling, glittering as if it had been made of diamonds, hung, suspended by silken cords, interwoven with pearls, a chandelier of rich crystal; while an immense carpet of white chenille, very thick and soft, spread itself under the feet.

The silken tapestry was raised a little, and the Queen perceived the entrance of a young lady, dressed in a long white robe, of some stuff so light and so soft, that she had never seen its equal; for this robe seemed to be made of the same material as the leaves of roses; it was without any ornaments, having only little white flowers round it, within a corsage of diamonds. This young lady wore on her head a wreath of the same flowers, and a full lace mantle, coming down to her feet, and enveloping her entirely, like some transparent cloud.

She held in her hand a little wand, made out of a single

diamond, by which token her Majesty knew her to be the Fairy Blanche.

"King Tremenor," said the Fairy, going up to his Majesty, "I am happy to see you; but may I know what has brought you here, as well as the Queen, your wife?"

"Madam, you, who are a Fairy," replied the King, "can easily tell the nature of this visit."

"Sire," returned the Fairy, with a smile, "I am able to tell you, that the Queen is about to be the mother of a daughter; but this does not explain why you have come here to seek me."

"Ah, Madam," exclaimed the King, "you do not wish to find it out; it was to ask the favor of your being godmother to our child."

"I consent," replied the Fairy, "and you see me now prepared to grant to the child three gifts, the choice of which I leave to you."

"Very well," cried the King, "I desire that my child shall be beautiful; that she shall possess every kind of talent, and that she shall be full of wit."

"Granted," said the Fairy.

"No, Madam," "the Queen hastened to say; "No; make her good as well."

"It is not in my power, Madam," replied the Fairy, "to alter gifts that have been granted; you should have spoken sooner."

"Oh, heaven! how could I, when the King prevented my putting in a word? Nevertheless, madam, will my daughter be good?"

"I think not," replied the Fairy; "beauty, wit, and cleverness, are the three sources from which flows vanity, that corrupts the heart."

"Alas," exclaimed the Queen; "am I so wretched as to be doomed to suffer through my child, whom I looked on as a consolation." Then turning a glance of anger on her husband, she hastily retired.

The thought had occurred to her of finding out the Old Man of the Mountain, in the hope that he might be able to repair the mischief.

IV.

THE REMEDY.

SHE mounted her chariot, and set out on the road to the Black Crown.

Now the Black Crown was a mountain so called, from having a rock of black stone on its summit, in the shape of an indented crown. The Queen stopped her carriage at the foot of the mountain, and set herself to climbing it, alone and without a guide. The briars tore her feet ; she got entangled in the thorns, and her hands were all scratched, torn, and bleeding.

She toiled thus for nearly an hour ; until at last an immense grotto came in sight, hewn in a rock of brilliant grey. Its entrance was hidden by a curtain of ivory, which the Queen lifted up, and then she made her appearance, with her face all scratched, her hands bleeding, and her dress torn to shreds, in the grotto, and found there the Old Man.

When the Old Man perceived her, he gently motioned her to sit down ; she fell exhausted on a settle in the cave.

" Alas, my lord," she exclaimed, " I recognised, not until too late, the wisdom of your advice ; nevertheless something must be done that my daughter may not have a heart as bad as her father's, and cause me as much suffering as he does himself." Then she went on to tell him all that had passed at the Fairy Blanche's palace.

" Madam," replied the Old Man, with some sadness, " it is not in my power to change the gifts which a powerful Fairy has given to your daughter ; yet I will go and search if there be any means of making her good as well as beautiful."

Hereupon the Old Man of the Mountain took up a book, about as big as Queen Peony herself, and turned over its leaves with great attention.

After a sufficiently long search, he said to the Queen :—

" Madam, your child can be born good, as well as clever, if you are willing to consent that she shall be born with the feet of a goose.

"With the claws of a goose!" cried the astonished Queen, "and why?"

"Because her goodness must be purchased by some sacrifice, madam; the decrees of the Genii are not permitted to alter the gifts of the Fairies; but they can occasionally modify them in some degree. The Princess, then, will be born with the feet of a goose; nor will this deformity disappear until the day when she shall voluntarily display them; only you must swear to me never to reveal this secret to her, for if she should once know that showing her goose's feet would cause them to vanish, the charm would thenceforth be indestructible, and the whole earth might see she had goose's feet, and they would still remain so."

The Queen uttered a sigh of sadness.

"She never will shew them of her own accord;" said the Queen.

"That is very likely," replied the Old Man. "Nevertheless, madam, are you willing to consent?"

"Alas!" answered the Queen; "you place me in a very dismal alternative, between the chagrin of seeing my child wicked, or seeing her deformed. Still, my lord, I accept what you propose, and I thank you."

With these words the Queen quitted the grotto of the Old Man of the Mountain.

No person in the palace knew what she had been about.

A short time afterwards, the Court and the people hailed the birth of the Princess Aubépine.

When the King saw this pretty fair child, with curls of golden hair, and those ugly goose's feet, he uttered a cry of rage and astonishment.

"What does this mean, Madam?" he demanded of the Queen.

"It means, sire," replied she, "that I prefer goodness to beauty."

The King shrugged his shoulders, and withdrew in disgust.

V.

THE PRINCESS.

THE Queen did not repent what she had done. It often happened, that while nursing her little daughter, she wept and felt troubled in her spirit; but the reflection soon came to her relief, that moral deformity was a hundred times more repulsive than physical malformation, and that the greatest of all evils is an ugly mind dwelling in a beautiful body.

She did her utmost, however, to conceal from all eyes this misfortune of the Princess's. She was a female, and her destiny was to please. She would be, or ought to be, some day, a Queen; it was necessary, at any price, that she should seem perfect in the eyes of her subjects.

Not far from the capital, there was a delicious spot of country, covered all over with flowers in spring-time, where, under shade of the thick foliage of evergreens, even winter disappeared in eternal verdure. High mountains surrounded it on all sides, and shut out every access to travellers. A gentle river escaping from the side of the highest of the mountains, wound along the bottom of the valley, in the midst of flowers, and formed there a small lake of transparent water, reflecting the blue sky. It would be impossible to imagine the beautiful birds that sang in the woods, and the charming fish, with golden scales, that swarmed in the waters of the lake, and the herds of deer and gazelles that browsed on the tender grass of the meadows. As neither hunting nor fishing were permitted in this valley, all the animals lived with mankind as with one another. The deer came to feed from the hand; the gazelles followed their mistress like lambs. The nightingales would perch on her shoulder, and sing their most heavenly cadences; when she sat on the banks of the lake, the fish would hasten up to see her, and frolicked and swam after each other, and capered about. When she took a walk round the lake, the whole band would follow her round the banks. It was easy to know from afar, where she was, only from seeing the merry fish, who would sometimes leap up as high as her head.

The mistress of this enchanting spot was the friend and confidant of the Queen, and the nurse of the young Princess Aubépine, who knew no other world than this valley. The lake was her ocean ; the park, planted on the slope of one of the gentle hills, was the only forest she had ever dreamed of ; it seemed to her, as if there was nobody else with her in the world, but her mother, her nurse, and the King, who idolised her in spite of her misfortune.

In this solitude she passed twelve years. In the morning, the sun tapped at her window with his golden rays, and joyously awoke her. She threw her arms round her nurse's neck, as she combed her long hair, and bound up her curls with a garland of flowers. They went out together to offer their prayers to God, in the midst of the marvels of his creation, that filled their hearts with admiration and gratitude. Then the child would fly off along the dewy grass, in the midst of flowers still closed from the coolness of the night, and just beginning to unfold their little petals. Many a starling was known to her by name, and she had intimate friends among the gazelles. The Queen never missed escaping from her palace, to come and embrace her dear treasure, and with her spend the sweetest hours of the day. The King could not visit them until later, because he was the King, obliged to wear on his head a heavy crown, to hold in his hand a great sceptre, and to drag after him a long mantle of velvet, lined with ermine. He could not walk a step without being preceded by drums and music, and deafened by cries of "Long live the King!" shouted in his ears. Every morning his Minister for Home Affairs rendered him an account of what had happened up to the previous evening ; his Minister of War, who was crippled with wounds, showed him the new uniforms in preparation for the soldiers ; his First Lord of the Admiralty brought him samples of the finest cargoes received at the outports ; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer took his opinion about some new tax. There came to him regularly, on ordinary days, fifty courtiers, who had each ten favours to ask ; which made five thousand favours and five thousand audiences a month. When it was a gala day at court, there was double the number of courtiers

to devour the poor King. Nevertheless, in the middle of all these cares of greatness, and the worry of politics he found means to escape, and catch a breath of air and life near his Aubépine. Oh! had she but feet like other young girls, pretty pink and white feet for him to take in his hand, and cover with kisses, the King would have thought his Courtiers agreeable, and his Ministers honest; he would have listened to the drums and trumpets as delicious music; his crown would not have weighed heavy on his brow, nor his regal mantle on his shoulders.

When Aubépine had reached her twelfth year, it was seen, that she had as much wit as beauty, and as much heart as wit. Her mother, therefore, determined to produce her at Court. She explained to her, not without many bitter tears, the necessity of using precautions to conceal her deformity. They made her always wear very long dresses, which gave dignity to her step; so that her sad secret was not discovered by any one.

Her beauty increased from day to day, and when, on occasions of ceremony, she sat at the feet of her father and mother, with her beautiful blond tresses woven with pearls, and her robe of white satin fastened with clasps of the same, nothing ever was seen like to her; and she was the admiration of the whole Court.

Her mother doated upon her; she alone had power to make her father smile; and as for the Court and the entire people, they never spoke of the Princess Aubépine, but with an exclamation of enthusiasm.

They were always saying,—“What a good Queen she will make! What talents she will show in governing us; and how we shall love her!”

The King and Queen consulted her on every occasion, as soon as she was old enough; and her decisions on the gravest questions were marked by an extraordinary sagacity.

The only pleasure she could not partake of, was, as may be supposed, dancing. Her step was always very gentle and slow, for fear of exposing her goose's feet; and she always obstinately refused to show herself at a ball.



VI.

THE PRINCE OPAL.

At no great distance from the kingdom of Queen Peony was a powerful State, over which reigned a King, then an old man, but whose wisdom made him respected by all the neighbouring nations.

Now, the fame of the beauty and excellent qualities of the Princess Aubépine had reached the ears of the King of the Isles of Light; and a portrait of this beautiful Princess had fallen into the hands of the King's son, who was so struck with admiration of such a lovely countenance, that he determined to have her for his wife.

He mentioned this project to his father, which the old King heartily approved of, from the consideration that an alliance between the heirs of two neighbouring kingdoms would bring them under one sceptre without trouble, and would be most fortunate in the future. He, therefore, sent the Prince Opal,—such was the name of this young Prince,—on an embassy to Queen Peony and King Tremenor, telling him to demand the Princess's hand in marriage, if her person were as pleasing to him as her portrait.

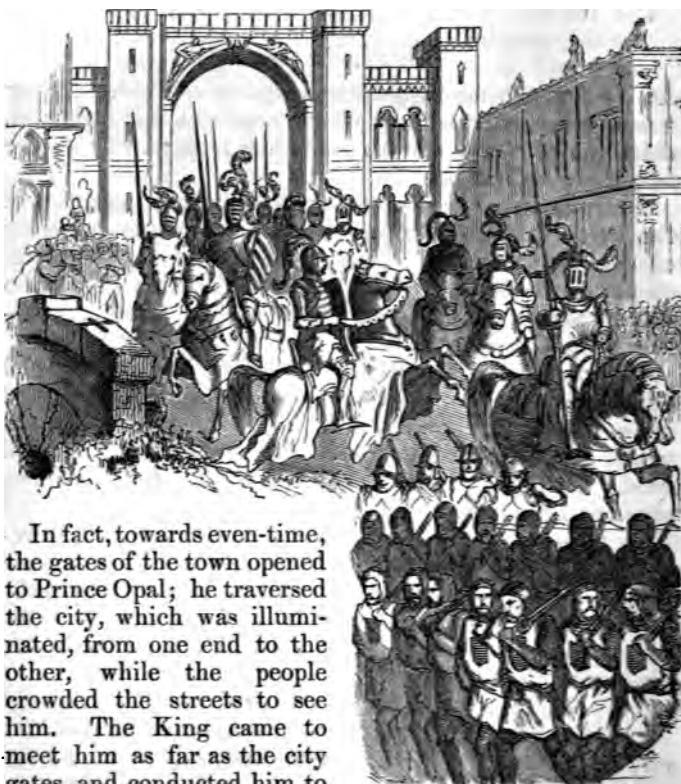
The Prince set off with a brilliant and numerous suite, carrying with him magnificent presents for the King, the Queen, and the Princess.

Now, a great number of suitors had already asked the hand of the Princess; but she had absolutely rejected them all: the King, therefore, who desired to see her advantageously married, announced to her, with much pleasure, the arrival of Prince Opal.

“He had no need to give himself the trouble,” she remarked, with a slight degree of sadness, as she shook her head.

“How,” said her father, taking her up rather briskly, “what is this you say, my daughter? Would you not be rejoiced to make such a noble alliance?”

The Princess was about to reply, when a courier entered in hot haste, to announce, that he had seen the suite of the Prince galloping rapidly, and that the royal ambassador would certainly reach the palace on that same day.



In fact, towards even-time, the gates of the town opened to Prince Opal; he traversed the city, which was illuminated, from one end to the other, while the people crowded the streets to see him. The King came to meet him as far as the city gates, and conducted him to his palace, on the balcony of which the Prince caught sight of the Queen and her daughter; and the young Princess struck him with admiration.

She was dressed in a robe of sky-blue satin, with a train, such as she was in the habit of wearing; this robe was open in front, and all down and around mounted with stars of diamonds; the bottom of her slip, which was white, was adorned with clasps of sapphires; in the hair of the Princess, diamonds and sapphires were twisted, and a coronet of diamond stars sparkled on her fair brow.

Thus arrayed, she was wonderfully beautiful.

The Princess Aubépine distinguished Prince Opal as he advanced, mounted on a steed white as snow, having the arms of his family embroidered in gold and pearls on his saddle-cloth of crimson velvet. A doublet of white satin and green velvet showed his elegant form; on his head was a cap of green velvet, from which sprang forth white flowing plumes, clasped together by an enormous emerald.

On perceiving the Queen and her daughter, he



bent down, in salutation, to his saddle-bow.

The Princess thought him the perfection of gracefulness; and when the Prince



dismounted, and saw closely her, whom he had thought so beautiful at a distance, his admiration grew stronger.

There was a grand ball in the evening, in honour of the Prince of the Isles of Light. It was out of the question to deny him such usual honors.

The Princess Aubépine made her appearance there for the first time; the young Prince advanced towards her, and asked her to dance with him. Aubépine colored up very much as she refused him. When the Prince went on to urge his request, the Queen said:—

“ My daughter dislikes dancing, Prince; you will excuse a caprice which nothing can overpower, and you will not ask her again.”

“ I sincerely regret,” said the young Prince to Aubépine, “ you should entertain an aversion to so charming a pleasure; but since it is so, permit me to remain beside you; I venture to hope a princess so accomplished has not a similar dislike to conversation.”

“ Quite the contrary,” replied Aubépine, smiling graciously; “ I like it very much: but I don't wish to deprive you of a pleasure of which you appear to be so particularly fond. Join the dancers, Prince, I shall look at you with satisfaction.”

“ Can you be ignorant, Madam, that, away from you, no enjoyment can exist for me?” responded the young Prince.

They passed the entire evening in looking at the dancing, which ceased at a tolerably early hour; since, as neither the Princess Aubépine nor the Prince danced, the ball was not very spirited.

Next day, there was a grand hunting party. The Princess sat her horse marvellously well, and was in better spirits than on the previous evening; for she felt her infirmity less, confident of its concealment under her long riding habit. Prince Opal was even more amiable than at night, and the Princess grew sad at the thought of having to reject the hand of so charming a Prince; but she would rather have died than have told him that she walked about on the hideous feet of a goose.

Five days passed in fêtes and diversions of all kinds.

Aubépine, each day, found the Prince more and more accomplished; while Prince Opal thought the Princess more and more adorable; so that at the end of the five days, he went to King Tremenor and demanded, in an official manner, the hand of the Princess, his daughter.

When the King announced this news to Aubépine, the Princess burst into tears. "Alas," she exclaimed, "I am now sufficiently miserable!"

The Queen pressed her in her arms, and embraced her with lively tenderness, in hope of soothing her regrets.

"Well, now, what can be the matter, my child?" said the King in astonishment; "What has happened to you?"

"Sire," said the Princess, wiping her eyes, "do you not understand that it is impossible for me to marry Prince Opal?"

"And why so, daughter?"

"But, father, consider, is it possible to love a woman, who, like me, has goose's feet? When the Prince comes to know this, he will refuse to wed me."

"The Prince has too much sense to act in such a manner, daughter. What," added the King, "is such an infirmity by the side of the good qualities which shine out in you; and, moreover, do you not see how valuable our alliance would be for the defence of his States in time of war?"

"If he marry me, I have no doubt he will regard me with horror," exclaimed Aubépine, renewing her tears; "do not require from me, my dear father, a sacrifice that I cannot make. I positively refuse to be married—I never will marry."

"She has too much reason," said the Queen sadly; "it shall be as you wish, my dear daughter. It is better to spare you useless humiliation. This young Prince is charming; but he is like other men, who never get the better of their prejudices; in spite of your beauties and your virtues, if you were his wife, he would never see any of them, but only your goose's feet."

King Tremenor, therefore, had to inform Prince Opal that his daughter had resolved never to marry, and that neither his wishes nor his prayers were able to triumph

over her determination ; that he should have been very happy to contract so close an alliance with the King of the Isles of Light ; but the infatuation of his daughter hindered him. The poor Prince was overwhelmed at this news, which was not at all what he expected ; he had flattered himself with the sweetest hopes, and saw them destroyed in an instant.

He determined to leave immediately, and never again set eyes upon the spot which recalled his misery : so, ordering his suite to prepare for a rapid departure, he went to take leave of the Queen. The Princess had gone out of the way, so as not to be present at this last interview. The Prince still more sad at not having met her—for he had rather reckoned on the moment of parting, to make her relent—mounted his white steed in silence, and driving his spurs into the sides of the beautiful animal, started off at a rapid pace, followed only by his esquire ; while all the gentlemen who had accompanied him, astounded at such a prompt departure, ran about in every direction, calling for their servants ; and, finding neither their horses nor their baggage, caused a noise and tumult that filled the whole palace.

V.

THE SPELL BROKEN, AND THE LEGS MENDED.

The Prince was galloping rapidly along the banks of a tolerably deep river, which traversed the town and then serpentine through the country, when all of a sudden he came to a dead stop. He had caught sight of the Princess Aubépine.

The Princess, accompanied by two ladies-in-waiting and her faithful nurse, walked slowly with her head bowed down, along a green bank that bordered the river.

She seemed more charming than ever to the poor Prince ; and he felt astonished and moved by her sadness ; for, hidden by a clump of trees, he was able to gaze his fill at her, without her seeing him.

As he was about to set forth on his journey again, a piercing cry struck his ear.

A little boy, who was playing on the banks of the river with the stones and shells, having let one of them drop into the water, leant over too far to pick it up, and fell into the river.

The Princess, listening only to her own good heart, ran to throw herself into the river, when she caught the gaze of Prince Opal fixed upon her, as he rode up as fast as his horse could carry him, to save the child whom he also had seen fall in.

The Princess checked herself for one moment, motionless, on the shore. The poor little child had entirely disappeared. The Prince was too far off to reach the bank in time. The generosity of Aubépine carried her beyond all other feelings; and, briskly lifting up her very long robe, she dashed into the waves.

Whereupon the astounded Prince saw, in place of those delicate feet he had dreamed of for his Princess, two ugly goose's claws!

The obstinate refusal of Aubépine was now explained. The discovery came upon him like a flash of lightning. As the young Princess had great difficulty in bringing the child back to land, he quickly dismounted from his horse, and reached the edge, at the moment the Princess, completely exhausted, deposited the child there safe and sound, and then fell senseless to the earth. The Prince took her in his arms, and set off carrying her back to the palace.

When the Princess came to herself, she saw near her the Prince Opal and her mother. The remembrance of what had passed came to her mind; and she hurriedly drew her dress over her claws.

"Oh, Madam," exclaimed Prince Opal; "was it from so weak a cause that you refused to make me happy for life? You have presented to my eyes a spectacle much too touching for me to think of so small an infirmity, redeemed, as it is, by such brilliant beauty, and such a noble heart. Accept, Madam, the crown of the Isles of Light; reign over a people who will be proud to hail you as their sovereign, and a heart that for ever will be entirely yours."

Scarcely had the Prince uttered these words, when the



door opened, and a venerable old man made his appearance. The Queen recognised the Old Man of the Mountain.

"Queen," said he, turning towards Queen Peony, "it is sixteen years since you came to me to ask me for your daughter goodness of heart; she only possessed that divine gift on condition of having goose's feet. These claws were to disappear on the day when the Princess should voluntarily shew them; that day has now arrived."

And the Old Man, kneeling down before the Princess, rubbed the goose's claws with some marvellous ointment, which he took from a box made of gold and rubies.

After the lapse of a few seconds, in place of hideous goose's claws, the Princess placed on a velvet cushion that had been set before her, the most ravishing foot in the world; a little rosy foot, delicate as the foot of a child, the foot of a fairy, or of a nymph, and such as fitly completed the charming whole of her figure.

"Go, Princess," said the Old Man, as he rose from his kneeling posture—" You are now both beautiful and good; the protection of the OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN shall follow you through life."

The marriage of the beautiful Princess Aubépine with the charming Prince Opal was celebrated with a fairy-like magnificence: the Princess danced at her own wedding with a spirit and a joy befitting such an occasion; and, as she had the prettiest feet in the world, she could not help betraying a certain coquetry in shewing them, and thus got the name of "The Princess with the Rosy Feet."

It is perfectly true, that they still show in the Isles of Light a foot carved in rose-coloured marble, which the inhabitants of that fortunate locality preserve with great respect, since it has been proved that this incomparable foot was modelled from that of the Princess Aubépine.



THE GOLDEN SPINNING-WHEEL.

I.

THE GOOD SISTER.

THREE was once upon a time a poor widow ; and she had two twin daughters. They were both very pretty girls, and so much alike, that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. But although they were exactly of the same figure and the same height, their characters were very different. One was called Maria, and was very docile, industrious, intelligent, and good ; the other, named Eliza, was exactly the contrary, lazy, haughty, false-speaking, and evil-disposed. Yet it was for this one that the mother showed a marked preference, and was always on the look-out for some means of satisfying every one of this child's little fancies.

This widow dwelt in a small cabin, in the middle of a forest, through which a stranger was rarely seen to pass, although it stood no very great distance from the town; whither, for the sake of her daughter's obtaining some little education, the old woman had taken and placed her in service with a respectable family.

As for Maria, she had to remain behind in the forest, and attend to all the duties of housekeeping. By an early hour in the morning she fed her goat, got breakfast ready, set the kitchen to rights, and then sat down to her spinning-wheel, at which she worked without ceasing. The delicate thread spun from her distaff was sold by her mother in the town ; and the old lady not unfrequently applied the proceeds, with great want of fairness, to buying some new object or other of finery for Eliza ; while Maria, who did the work, got nothing for herself. Nevertheless, the good girl loved her mother dearly, scrupulously obeyed her, and bore her injustice without complaining.

One day, when she was alone in the cabin, seated at her wheel, spinning very rapidly and singing—as was her usual habit, to amuse herself while at work—she heard, on a sudden, the beat of a horse's hoofs, and approached the window; on looking through which, she saw a young man mounted on a fiery horse, with a rich mantle of furs on

his shoulder, and a velvet bonnet, adorned with a white plume, on his head.

"What a handsome cavalier," said she. "See! he is coming here; he is getting off his horse; I must go and see what he wants."

At the same moment, the stranger opened the door—for at this period, you must understand, people had neither locks nor bolts to their houses, and nobody ever robbed anybody.

"Good morning, fair damsel; and Heaven's blessing to you," said the young man; "I am very thirsty; could you oblige me with a glass of water?"

"Immediately," replied Maria, "pray be seated."

She took a pitcher, that she had washed well and rubbed bright in the morning, ran to the fountain, and came back to the young man, saying, "I am sorry I have not got anything better to offer you to drink."

"Thank you," said the cavalier; "I wish for nothing else."

After he had drunk, he handed back the pitcher to Maria, and, without her perceiving it, slipped a purse full of gold under the pillow of her bed.

"What fine water," said he; "will you permit me to come and see you again to-morrow."

"Most willingly," replied Maria, "if it be agreeable to you."

He held out his hand to her, remounted his horse and rode away.

The young girl sat herself down again to her spinning-wheel; but the image of the good-looking cavalier still hovered in her thoughts, and broke many a thread as her thoughts wandered after him into the forest, far away from her distaff.

That evening, when her mother came back from the town, she began at once to tell her a long story of the many fine things Eliza had got, and how every day she was growing more and more handsome; and ended by enquiring if Maria had seen anybody pass the house; for there had been, she was told, a grand hunt in the forest.

"I have seen," said Maria, "a handsome lord, who

wore a mantle of furs, and a cap with a white plume ; no doubt he was one of the hunt. He asked me, very politely, to give him a glass of water, and then he went away."

Sly little puss that she was ! She did not add, that he had squeezed her hand, and was to come again.

A few minutes after, as she was getting ready to go to bed, she moved the pillow, and the purse, the cavalier had placed under it, fell to the ground.

"What is this?" said the widow ; "who has made you such a present?"

"No one; unless, perhaps, the cavalier, in his generosity, hid it there."

"Here is gold! gold!" exclaimed the old woman, in a transport of delight ; "it is the gift of that rich lord ; who, seeing our poverty, has determined to help us. May heaven bless him!"

At these words, she put back in the purse the glittering pieces, she had laid out in rows on the table, and hid it in the bottom of a chest.

Maria, who thought nothing of the gold and a great deal of the handsome hunter, fell asleep, and dreamt a strange dream. She dreamed that she saw herself in a magnificent castle, seated with a wedding wreath on her head, at a splendid table ; yet pursued by a monstrous animal which struck its claws into her heart !

She arose in the morning much troubled in mind at so frightful a dream ; yet, for all that, she dressed herself with more than ordinary care. Her wardrobe, to be sure, was not very extensive ; consisting, as it did, of only one gown, and that of blue calico ; but it fitted her pretty shape extremely well. Her hair was prettily plaited with the red ribbons that she never wore but on holiday occasions, and she tied round her waist a silk apron. Thus dressed, she was, indeed, charming to look upon.

Her mother went out, as usual, to collect wood in the forest. Maria expected the hunter, and all the while she was spinning off her thread, frequently took her eyes off her work to have a peep at the window.

Towards midday the hunter arrived, saluted the young girl with much politeness, and then took a seat by her side.

"Have you slept well?" said he.

"Yes, if it had not been for a dream I had, which still agitates me."

"Will you tell your dream to me?"

Maria described to him with much innocence and archness, the singular images that had appeared to her.

"With the exception of that frightful animal that pursued you so cruelly, your dream may turn out true. Are you willing to marry me?"

"Oh, Sir!" replied Maria, blushing, "a poor girl like me!"

"I am speaking seriously to you; and, in coming here to-day, I resolved to make this proposal to you." Thus saying, he held out his hand to her.

The young girl, all in confusion, gave him her own.

On the re-entrance of the widow, the young cavalier went forward to meet her, expressed his wishes, and asked her blessing.

"I am the possessor," he said to her, "of a handsome patrimony, and a house large enough for you to live there with us yourself. Let me have your daughter."

The old woman gave her consent.

"Now then," said the hunter, turning to Maria, "work quickly and well; for, when you have spun your wedding-dress, I shall come to fetch you." With these words he embraced her, and departed.

From that day the widow behaved most affectionately to her daughter; though, for all that, she did not cease still more tenderly to look after the interests of the evil-disposed Eliza, for whom she laid in a rare store of gew-gaws with the money the hunter had left for them on the bed. But Maria scarcely troubled herself about this unjust prodigality, as she worked with ardour the more quickly to finish the cloth that was to serve for her wedding clothes.

The very day she had accomplished this, her betrothed made his appearance.

"Is all ready?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"Can you come with me now, at once?"

LADY GOODCHILD'S FAIR

" Why so suddenly?"

" It must be. To-morrow, it is my duty to depart to join the army, and I should like to be married before I leave, and instal you, my love, in my own house, so as to have the delight of finding you there on my return. Come, let us seek your mother."

The widow did not welcome, very pleasantly, the wish of the impatient young man for so immediate a departure, and so speedy a marriage; for, in truth, she had got up a secret plot of her own to a different effect. But what could be done? It was impossible to withstand emergencies of such a character.

" Do not fret about it," said he to her. And when you wish to come and see your daughter, ask at the castle of the Prince, for Down-on-the-Nail. Any one will tell you the street to go to."

At these words, he took Maria by the hand as she was weeping at leaving her mother, lifted her up lightly, and seated her on his horse. Then they went off.

At the castle of the Prince, as they rode up, there was a great movement among the soldiers, and a number of people who seemed to be awaiting the arrival of a cavalier. As soon as they caught sight of him, shout joy resounded through the air.

" Long live our Prince," they cried; " Long live young Princess."

These shouts redoubled when the cavalier, with his trothed, entered the court-yard of the castle. Maria was like one stupefied.

" And is it then you, my dear, who are the said she, to the young cavalier.

" Yes, it is I. Are you sorry for it, love?"

" What does your rank matter to me, dear?"

" Why have you so cheated me?"

" I have tricked you, my love. I told

a with all due respect
I presented his

II.

THE BAD SISTER.

Poor Maria felt like a lost lamb as she wandered through her vast and splendid dwelling: and would have much preferred awaiting the return of her husband in her solitary cabin, in the middle of the forest. But she soon began to get over her disquiet and shyness, and conversed and associated with the court in the castle, winning over to herself the affections of all in a short time, by her grace and gentleness.

A few days afterwards she sent for her mother, and requested her to bring the spinning-wheel. She thought her mother would come, and rejoice with her at her brilliant destiny: but she was mistaken. The widow took a contrary view of affairs, and was saddened at Maria's good-fortune; for she loved no one but the evil-disposed Eliza, to whom she had planned making over this grand good-fortune; and the thought of this was always on her mind.

One morning she said to Maria,—“I know your sister has been unjust towards you, but she is sorry for it. Forgive her, let us go and see her, and do you ask her to come and stay with you.”

“Very willingly,” replied the kind and trusting Maria.
“Let us go and visit her at once.”

They ordered the carriage immediately.

On reaching the borders of the forest she told the servant to wait there, and then directed her steps to the cabin. Eliza ran out to meet them, embraced her with tenderness, and made her go in. But no sooner was the beautiful Princess in the lonely chamber, than the horrible women seized hold of her, and Eliza stuck a poinard into her bosom. Next they robbed her of both her eyes, and cut off her two hands and her two feet, which they wrapped up in a cloth. As for the mutilated corpse, that they dragged out into the wood. This done, Eliza took her sister's clothes, and dressed herself in them, then rejoined the carriage with her mother, and ordered it to the castle, where everybody received her as Maria, so perfect was the resemblance between them.

For all that, however, poor Maria was not dead. soon came to herself, and it seemed to her as if some be



volent hand was applying a reviving cordial to her]
The remembrance of what had happened to her came]
a dark cloud over her mind, and she groaned at the]
barity of her mother and sister.

"Keep silence, my good little girl," said a compassionate voice to her; "do not complain; all will end well."



"Alas!" said she, "what will become of me; whither shall I go. Never again can I see the light of the sun — never more can I hold out my hand to my dear Down-on-the-Nail — never more shall I be able to walk by the side of my handsome husband."

He who had been speaking to her, and who was one of the Genii of the Forest, summoned a boy, and placing in his hands a golden spinning-wheel, said to him, "Go thou, with this spinning-wheel, into the city, and betake thyself to the castle of the Prince. If any one ask thee what is the price thou puttest upon it, reply, thou wilt give it for two eyes, and for nothing else."

The boy departed. Eliza caught sight of him, just as she was going to take a walk with her mother.

"Look at that," she exclaimed; "what a noble spinning-wheel! How I should like to buy it!"

They approached the boy.

"What askest thou for that machine?" said she to him.

"Two eyes."

"Two eyes! What do you mean?"

"Such is the will of my father."

Eliza looked at the spinning-wheel. The more she gazed on it, the more it charmed her. She called to mind that she had got somewhere the two eyes that had belonged to her sister; she gave them to the boy, who forthwith conveyed them back to the forest.

The Old Man took them and replaced them delicately under the eyelids of Maria.

"Oh, heaven!" she exclaimed, "I can once more see the sky, the wood, the pleasant verdure. What happiness!" Her eyes then rested on the good Genius, who was leaning over her. "It is you," she said, "to whom I owe this benevolence. Oh that I could take your hand and carry it gratefully to my lips."

"Calm thyself," answered the Old Man, "and wait."

Next day, the boy went again to the castle, with a bobbin and reel, made of gold; and the price he asked for this golden bobbin was two feet!

Eliza, unable to resist this new temptation, handed over to him the two handsome little feet of her unfortunate sister.

The Old Man fitted them on to the maiden's legs, having first anointed them with a magic balm. The young woman was about to raise herself up with a leap of joy.

"No, no," said her liberator; "stir not a step. Wait until you are completely cured."

On the following day, the faithful messenger revisited the castle with a golden distaff, for which he asked two hands.

"I must have that golden distaff," said Eliza, so she gave up the two hands as well.

By this time, the good Maria had received the whole of her faculties; and thanks to the care of the powerful Genius, she was more lively than ever. "How shall I testify my gratitude to you," said she. "Speak, there is nothing I will not do for you in return for my health and safety."

"You owe me no thanks," replied the Old Man; "I have only done my duty. But stop, I pray you, here in this grotto, until a certain person comes; and wait with patience—I will see all your wants provided for."

At these words he vanished.

Maria ran round the grotto in a transport of joy; now raising her eyes heavenward, in a kind of ecstasy; now clasping the verdant trees in her arms; then would she gather the flowers growing in the moss; then turn her gaze towards the side of the town where she had been married. She was very anxious to go back there, but dared not disobey the Old Man's order. During this time some happy news was made known at the castle. The Prince was about to return, and all the people there awaited him with impatience; for Eliza treated them with much harshness. At last he arrived; the perfidious Eliza ran confidently to meet him, and Down-on-the-Nail embraced her affectionately, in the belief that he was embracing his virtuous wife.

"What have you done during my absence? No doubt you have sat at your spinning-wheel?"

"Yes," answered Eliza; "and at a superb golden wheel; that I have bought."

"Shew it me, then; and let me have the pleasure of once more seeing how handy you are at your spinning."

Eliza seated herself, and set the wheel in motion, from which, at once, there issued a supernatural sound; and the

voice of an invisible being seemed modulated into these words.

"Trust her not, good lord, for she is false and cruel.
That is not thy true wife; thy true wife she has butchered."



Eliza stopped bewildered, as if struck down by a thunderbolt. The Prince looked round on all sides, trying

to make out whence the voice came; and then directed Eliza to go on.

The spinning-wheel revolved again, and again the mysterious voice made itself heard. "Trust her not, my lord, for she is a liar and cruel. She has slain her sister, and dragged her into the forest."

At this last revelation, Eliza rose hurriedly and wished to take to flight. But the Prince obliged her to be re-seated, and turn the spinning-wheel once more; this time the voice cried out: "My lord, mount your horse; ride to the forest; penetrate into the grotto. There, the wife you desire awaits you."

That instant Down-on-the-Nail rushed into the courtyard, ordered his best horse to be saddled, and dashed off at a gallop to the forest.

There he went about from one side to another, searching for the grotto, until, on a sudden, he saw a white doe leaping before him. He followed her, and arrived near a rock, in which he saw a cleft. At the bottom of this cleft was his dear Maria.

He threw himself in her arms, and asked pardon from her, for having suffered himself to be deceived, for an instant, by the resemblance between her form and her sister's. Then he returned with her to his castle, where, by his order, the infamous Eliza and the ferocious widow were punished as they deserved. Maria proved a blessing to all around her, and lived many years in great happiness with her worthy husband.

THE SEA-KING'S BRIDE.

ONCE upon a time there lived a man and a woman, who had two beautiful children—a boy called Tuvni, and a girl named Selma. The daughter remained at home with her parents; the boy went out to earn his living, as boys ought to do, by working as a shepherd in the domain of the King of the country. Now this lad, who was a clever young fellow, was very fond of his sister. He was

always thinking of her, bringing her home flowers, or birds' eggs, or any curious and pretty pebbles he might pick up while wandering with his flocks. One day, while the sheep were all comfortably under his eye and nibbling away at their pasture without fear, on some quiet and lovely downs, Tuvni sat down on a stone, and taking out a large sheet of paper and a pencil, began to draw a portrait of his pretty sister.

It happened that the Prince of the country—who had been crossed in love some two years before, and had taken to living alone and walking about in the fields by way of consolation—was passing by the meadow, on his way to a neighbouring mill to enquire the price of oats, and saw Tuvni, pencil in hand, busily engaged in his drawing.

"What's this," said the Prince, looking round to his two lords-in-waiting, who always walked a short distance behind him; "a shepherd-boy turned artist! Let us see what kind of a scratching the poor fellow makes of it."

The noble lords agreed with the Prince, as noble lords usually do with Princes, that it was a curious thing to see a shepherd-boy do anything besides mind his sheep; and, also, that it would be a good joke to look at his bad drawing. So the Prince and the noble lords walked up to Tuvni; his Royal Highness little thinking, as few of us do just before some great turn in our lives, that on the looking over that boy's shoulder, would depend the happiness or misery of his life.

Of course he expected to see a sheep with three legs and a very long tail, or a windmill with crooked sails, or a cottage with more smoke coming out of the chimney than the house could hold, or some such other designs as little boys are used to put upon their drawing paper. But how was he surprised, when the lovely face of a beautiful young girl looked out upon him from the paper; a face so much prettier than that of the middle-aged Princess who had rejected him for not being able to speak French, and taking off his gloves at dinner time, that the sight of it not only cured at once the wound of his former love, but lighted a flame in his royal breast, such as only true love can ever give rise to.

"Bow-wow!" said the shepherd's dog, at the approach of strangers near his master; for Pepperpot was one of that knowing breed of dogs that does not take notice of fine clothes.

"Be quiet, Pepperpot," said Tuvni, as he, for the first time, noticed the Prince and his companions.

"Does your dog bite?" enquired Goldstick-in-waiting, affecting to look careless.

"No, my lord," said the honest Tuvni; "he never bites sheep, or gentlemen belonging to the Court."

Whereupon the Prince, with a smile, drew closer to the drawing, and began to examine it with the eye of a connoisseur; Pepperpot, all the while, with his ears cocked and one eye sharp on the Lords-in-waiting; while the other was turned up towards the Prince's face, as if sharing his taste, seemed to wait the royal judgment on his young mistress's portrait.

"Charming, lovely, beautiful!" exclaimed the Prince.

"Beautiful, lovely, charming!" echoed the Lords, who saw nothing where they stood; and knew not whether the Prince was looking at a cow or a Princess.

"Is that a portrait, my lad?" enquired the Prince thoughtfully.

"It is, Sir," replied Tuvni, beginning to feel very proud of his own skill; "it is my sister!"

"Your sister!" exclaimed the Lords, who saw which way the wind was blowing in the mind of their royal master; "how very handsome!" not that they had yet seen the portrait.

The Prince hesitated for an instant, "Boy," said he, at last, his feelings getting quite the better of him, "boy! if your sister be really as beautiful, as she seems in that drawing, go and fetch her."

Now Tuvni was a tough lad, open-hearted, straightforward, and one that liked to speak his mind. He knew the Prince very well, for he had often before seen him walking about the fields; but what did the Prince want with his sister? So Tuvni did not stir.

"Go and fetch her, my lad!" said Goldstick-in-waiting.

"Go and fetch her, Sir," shouted the Groom of the Stole.



"What for?" enquired Tuvni, who loved his sister too well to allow any harm to come near her; "What for, your Royal Highness?"

This was a question the Prince did not exactly expect; but, taken at the minute, he replied at once (as other people have been known to do to other people's brothers, in reply to similar enquiries). "What for? Why to marry her, to be sure."

"A bargain," said Tuvni; "and these two gentlemen for you, and Pepperpot for me, shall be our witnesses."

"Agreed," said the Prince. "Goldstick! give him your hand upon it."

The Lord-in-waiting did not seem best pleased at placing his white-jewelled fingers in the coarse, brown, horny palm of the hard-working shepherd-boy, but held it with a slight grimace; nor did the Prince mend matters by telling his Groom of the Stole, at Tuvni's request, to take care of the lad's sheep, while he went on the royal errand.

"Shall I leave you the dog?" enquired Tuvni.

"Not for worlds," replied the Lord-in-waiting, his teeth chattering with horror, at the prospect of being left alone on a common for two or three days, perhaps, with such a savage-looking animal.

"Come along, Pepperpot," said Tuvni; and started off on his road to fetch his sister to be married to the Prince.

As soon as he reached his parents' house, he let the old people know the great news, and had no great trouble in obtaining their consent; so he said to his sister, "You must come along with me to the castle; for the Prince intends to marry you."

Now, Selma, his sister, whose face was as fresh as morning cowslips, and her complexion as fair as the first cream, did not seem so wonderstruck as he expected, at hearing the Prince wanted to marry her, nor so ready to go, as he thought she would be, at the first invitation.

"I wish boys would learn to mind their own business," was her answer to Tuvni's grand tidings; "I don't want to leave home, and I shall not go to the castle; and I don't want to marry the Prince."

This answer sadly puzzled poor Tuvni, who would have known what to do with her, if she had been an obstinate sheep. Since, as we have said, he did not know what to do, he did nothing but scratch his head, and stand waiting for her.

"No," went on the pretty Selma, "I will not leave this dwelling, until all the stones that surround it are ground to powder."

Tuvni, though he was no talker, was a great doer; so he took her at her word, picked up all the stones, broke them and crushed them, and ground them into powder. It was a long job and very hard work, as you may well suppose.

As soon as he had finished, "Now then, Selma," said he, "come along."

"No," replied the young girl, "I can't think of going and leaving my work half done; look at all those hanks of flax." (For the scene of our story is laid, you must know, in Finland, where all the peasant girls collect and dress the flax that afterwards comes over here and is made into linen). "I shall not quit this cottage until every one of them has been spun!"

Tuvni felt much vexed at this, for he knew the Prince was waiting; and he began to think how very awkward the Groom of the Stole would be in tending the sheep, and how very silly the poor sheep would think him.

But this time Selma went to work herself with a will; the wheel went briskly humming round, and the distaff fairly spun in her fingers. The work thrrove well: hank after hank of the flax was reeled off; and at last the great heap that had so frightened Tuvni sank to nothing.

"Now then, are you coming, sister," said her brother to Selina.

"No, I will never quit this house for the royal castle to be married, until the threshold of the door shall be worn out by the rubbing of my gown as I go over it."

"That will be a long time, indeed!" said Tuvni; but the cunning fellow knew, by the way she said this, that she only wished to be cheated, so he broke the stone without her seeing him, and then told her her gown had

worn it out. What we wish to happen, we are not slow to achieve ; and as there was a fine young Prince on one side of the door, and only an old father and mother on the other, she shed a few tears, embraced them, bid them good bye, and got ready to set out with her brother Tuvni.

But as she was going to be married, she thought it right to take her best clothes with her (and we believe there are few young ladies of her age who would not be of the same opinion); so she went to the great wooden chest, by the side of her bed, and took out her gown, and her boddice, and her petticoat, and her cloak, and followed Tuvni along the road.

Now, before they could reach the castle of the King, it was necessary for them to cross the sea ; we don't mean the wide ocean, but one of those inlets up which the sea runs a long way into the country, that are called *fjords* or friths, and by crossing over which, in a boat, many, many miles of distance are saved, in going from place to place.

On getting down to the shore, they found their little dog, Fanfan, a very clever and cunning fellow, with pretty long broad ears, and a feathery tail, had run down before them. He begged so hard to go with them, nestled his head down in the sand at their feet, looked up in their faces, rolled on his back, wagged his tail so delightedly, and whined so piteously, that Selma, who could not help fancying there was something remarkable in the conduct of the animal, had not the heart to send him back, and so, at her request, Tuvni, who was in too great a hurry to be off to care much about anything, agreed to let Fanfan go with them in the boat.

You have all of you heard of Grace Darling, and her bravery in starting out through the storm, and of her dexterity in managing a boat. She saved the lives of the passengers from a wrecked ship — and we dare say, many of you have said,—our little girl readers we are now addressing,—“Ah ! we would have done the same, had we been Grace Darling, and seen the wrecked passengers crying for help ; we would have risked our lives to save



theirs, only how could we have done so for we could not row the boat!" But in countries where the farm houses are by the sea-side, and in islands where there are no roads, but water between them, all the women can row, and steer, and manage boats, the same as the men. So when Selma got into the boat that was to carry her over the fiord to the castle of the King, where she was to marry the Prince, she went forward and took up an oar, and calmly sat down to pull one of them, while her brother Tuvni pulled the other. And so they went along merrily, these two young people, the good-natured brother and the pretty gentle sister, singing a song to the time of the measured stroke of their oars, as they glided over the deep blue waters of the northern sea, that sparkled fresh and bright at each dip of the blades. And merry, why not? for they were good and innocent, and happy surely, for they loved each other dearly, and every body else well, and one of them was on the way to be married.

But there is no sky without a cloud! At the first halt they made, at the foot of a promontory, they saw standing on the shore, an ugly old woman, whom Selma quickly recognised as Senjata, one of the wicked witches that at that time abounded in the country.

"Ah, my dear children, I am so glad to see you; I was beginning to be very much afraid I should have to walk all the way round to the castle, where I am bound to go to-day, to pay my taxes. I am so thankful you have come, you will take me with you, won't you, my pretty dears?"

"Shall we take her in, Selma?" asked Tuvni, who, from being always out in the fields all day, and too sleepy to talk or listen when he came home at night, knew very little of his neighbours or their characters. "Poor old lady, she seems quite tired, let her get in our boat."

"No!" replied Selma; "let us avoid keeping company with bad people."

At the next halt, they found Senjata there before them, waiting for them. She addressed them again with a similar request, more strongly urged. Tuvni, who was soft-hearted by nature, began to hesitate. But his sister,

who was firm though gentle, said again, "Don't take her with us; let us avoid the ill-disposed."

At the third halting-place, the confiding Tuvni allowed himself to be softened by the supplications of the perfidious Senjata.

His sister said to him, "You will see what will come of it. Now, may heaven protect us!"

Grinning malignantly at Selma, but with an awkward curtsey of much politeness to Tuvni, the witch Senjata took her seat in the boat between the brother and the sister, and began to shew her gratitude at once by throwing a spell over the boat, by which they both were made deaf.

"My dear sister," said Tuvni, "get up and set your dress to rights; we shall soon be at the King's castle."

But Selma could not hear him.

"What does he say?" she enquired of the witch.

"Your dear brother," replied the wicked Senjata, "says you are to stop rowing and throw yourself into the water."

Selma ceased rowing, but remained motionless in the boat. Senjata seized the oar.

A moment after, Tuvni said to Selma, "Stand up; you will see the castle immediately."

"What does he say?" enquired Selma.

"He says you must take off your clothes and throw yourself headlong in the waves."

The young girl, without a word, resigned herself to this cruel order; for she could only fancy that her brother had brought her out in the boat, with that abominable old woman, solely for the purpose of killing her. She took off her gown, her robe, her petticoat, boddice, and cap, but she still kept in the boat.

"Here we are close to the castle," said Tuvni, whose back was all this while turned to them, "get ready, my dear sister, to jump ashore."

Selma again enquired of that dreadful old woman what it was her brother was saying; and the wicked witch replied, "He declares that he must either tear out your eyes, or break your arms, or throw you into the sea."

"I prefer throwing myself into the sea," murmured the young girl sadly, as she cast herself into the water.

Tuvni, horror-struck, would have dashed in after her, to save her; but Senjata prevented him, and went on rowing, and the unfortunate Selma disappeared under the stream.

"Alas! What shall I do," exclaimed her brother. "How dare I shew myself before the Prince, without the bride I promised him."

"Don't alarm yourself about that," replied the witch, trying to look amiable and pretty, and pulling the ugliest face in the world. "See how like I look to Selma. Present me to the King as your sister, and you will be richly rewarded."

The feeble-minded Tuvni, not knowing what to resolve, accepted this proposal.

On the shore stood the Prince, awaiting with impatience the arrival of the beautiful Selma. When he saw Senjata—who, in spite of all the best clothes of Selma, which she had awkwardly put on, could not hide her natural ugliness—he shuddered.

"Is that person there your sister," said he, turning angrily and wildly upon poor Tuvni.

"Yes," replied Tuvni, drooping his head, and wishing himself, at the same time, a hundred miles off, or under the waters of the *fiord*, fifty fathoms down, by the side of his dear Selma.

"Very well," went on the Prince. "I am not a man to go from my word, I will marry your sister; for it is no fault of hers that she is not handsome. But you, my lad, shall be punished for having taken me in with your portrait of her.

So he ordered his servants to cast the young herdsman down to the bottom of a deep ditch full of serpents; which was accordingly done.

Next day when they came to look into the ditch, the men employed perceived Tuvni to be entirely uninjured; for the snakes refused to bite the good young man.

"This is something strange," said they to each other; "but perhaps the snakes are not hungry; or it is one of their fast days; or it may be the last criminal thrown down, who was a very bad one indeed, disagreed with them. Let us wait and see what to-morrow brings forth.



We must now change the scene from land, with its green hills and bright skies, to the depths of the sea and its coral caves and treasures. All the while, what we have just told was happening at the King's castle, another royal personage, the King of the Sea, charmed with the beauty of Selma, when she fell into his arms, bore her to his realm, where he had a palace of crystal constructed for her, in which she might walk about without wetting her feet, and admire all the wonders of the world of waters. The King's son asked her to marry him; made her presents of necklaces, of pearls and bracelets, of coral and all the treasures of the many ships sunk in the waves. But Selma, who had heard from a sea-snake the frightful situation of her brother, had no thought for any one but him; and when alone, sat down to embroider a necktie of gold and silver. Then she supplicated the King of the Sea to permit her to go up to the surface of the waters for the purpose of sending this cravat on to the Prince, and so moving his pity on behalf of Tuvni.

The King told her he would consent to her doing so; but only on condition that she should be fastened to his palace of crystal by a chain of silver.

Near the shore, on that spot, dwelt a kind and intelligent widow, whose house abutted on some stairs, which descended into the sea. At midnight the palace of crystal rose up above the waves in a direction towards this point. It was encircled by a legion of fishes and water-nymphs, who danced and sang about it. As soon as she placed her foot on the stairs, Selma perceived a little dog that was looking for its mistress, and running incessantly from the shore to a boat, and from a boat to the shore.

"Fanfan, my pretty Fanfan," said the young girl to him; for she recognised immediately her faithful little dog, "go, open the castle door very gently; don't wake the servants or the cat; slip up into the chamber of the Prince, and place this elegant necktie upon his pillow, so that he may take pity upon my poor brother."

The intelligent Fanfan carried out his mistress's orders punctually; and then came back leaping and dancing to rejoin her.

"Be here to-morrow at midnight," said Selma to him ; "I shall want you again."

After these words, she re-entered her palace of crystal, and slowly went down in it back again, to the bottom of the sea.

Next morning when the Prince awoke and saw the cravat lying on his pillow, he exclaimed, "Who can have done this charming embroidery?"

"I did it," responded the roguish Senjata, with a smirk of affected benevolence that made her look three times as ugly ; "I have been working at it all night, while you have been asleep."

The Prince did not say a word ; in the first place, because he was too much of a gentleman to contradict a lady ; and, in the second place, as for contradicting his wife, that handsome and elegant person had already signified to him her determination, not only to have her rights, but also to have everything her own way. He did not believe, nevertheless, that this female was able to execute any such beautiful work ; and, if at all, certainly, not in one night ; especially when, as he knew for a certainty, from the straining of one of his ears, that she had been snoring loudly by his side for three parts of the night at least. He made enquiries, whether any one had been seen to enter the castle ; but the servants answered they had not.

He then enquired about the young herdsman, and in what condition he was at that time. The report from the royal executioner to the Home Secretary, was placed before him ; and it said that he was safe and sound as before.

"I can't understand this at all," said the Prince.

Perplexed at what was going on around him ; the singular conduct and appearance of the strange woman to whom he was married ; and the remarkable preservation of the young herdsman ; he determined to go and consult the widow, who lived on the sea-shore, the general rumour of whose sagacity had reached his ears.

"Listen," said he to this widow ; "I caused a man to be thrown into a ditch full of vipers. In the usual course of things, they would have devoured their prey in a few hours ; but this man they only look at and don't bite. I cannot unriddle this prodigy."

"For what cause was it that you had that man thrown into the ditch of vipers?"

"Because he cheated me; because he told me he had a sister of extraordinary beauty, and his sister is hideous. Oh!—" And here the Prince was almost taken ill at the thought of his bride.

"You are under an error," replied the widow; "the young man's sister is at the bottom of the water; it is she who sent you an embroidered cravat; while the woman you have taken as your bride is the malignant witch Senjata."

The Prince jumped up horror-struck, rushed from the house, ran up into the top room of his castle, where he shut himself in and remained for the whole day, absorbed in turning over these matters in his mind, and thinking what was to be done.

Meanwhile, Selma was at work, making a shirt of the finest cambric. As soon as she had got it done and nicely ironed; she asked leave from the King of the Sea to go up again to the surface of the waves; and there found her faithful little dog, Fanfan, waiting for her on the very last step of the stairs.

"Fanfan," said she to him; "my pretty Fanfan, open the door of the castle very gently; don't wake the servants or the cat; slip up into the Prince's bed-room, and place this shirt on his pillow, so that he may take pity on my poor brother."

The alert Fanfan did what he was ordered, and just as well as at first.

Next morning when he awoke, the Prince exclaimed, "Who is it has worked for me this beautiful shirt?"

"I," answered the undaunted Senjata, moving towards him to put her arm round his royal neck, and looking as if she expected a grateful kiss; "I have been at work all night, while you were asleep."

The Prince was going to let drop out of his lips a very short and not very polite word; but he gulped it down in time; however, we are permitted by the court newsman to mention, that it was a word by which his Royal Highness intended to impart the information of his not

placing entire faith in what it had pleased his royal bride to say to him.

And we are ourselves inclined to be of the same opinion; else why, in place of an agreeable chat with her royal highness over his cup of coffee at breakfast, did he mount a milk-white steed, light a cigar, and, unattended by any of his court, with a wide-awake on his head in place of a crown; a comforter round his throat, instead of the Order of the Bath; and a pilot-coat, in place of the usual royal robes—why, we say—did he go off at once, in the same morning, to the house of the wise widow by the sea-side, to consult her about the new surprises that had befallen him; first, in the shape of a new cambric shirt, with handsomely embroidered front; and secondly, that, again, he had heard that morning from the Chief Commissioner of Police, who had placed several detectives on watch during the whole night to prevent deception; that the young herdsman was a great deal better than could be expected, and quite as well as the day before!

"I tell you," said the wise woman to the Prince, "that it is not that vile Senjata, who has worked you *that* beautiful cambric shirt. It is the lovely Selma, who is now at the bottom of the sea; and who has come up as far as this house, in her palace of crystal, dressed in a robe of gold and silver."

"Will she come back again," the Prince hurriedly enquired.

"Yes, she will come back again yet once more. After that, she must be wedded to the son of the King of the Seas. If you wish to carry her off from this pretender, you must have a long chain of iron made, and a strong, sharp-cutting sickle. As soon as she puts her foot on the shore, cut with the sickle the chains that fasten her to the palace, and carry her off with your own chain. By the magic of the King of the Seas, she will assume numerous shapes to get away from you; but be firm and you will keep her."

Midnight arrived: the moon shone brightly on the glistening waters; but the stairs of the pier were in dark shadow. All was silent on sea and land; when, suddenly, a

thousand ripples were seen sparkling up in the water, as the pointed pinnacles of the Palace of Crystal rose above the surface; while the sea-nymphs floated around, singing their softly murmured songs, and the fish, in bright shoals, dashed and flashed about, and the soft breeze united to blend all in a charming chorus. Forth from the crystal palace, over a bridge of crystal, which fell from it down to the water's edge, glistening like large diamonds in the moonlight, stepped the charming Selma, calm in gentle beauty as the stars of heaven, and clothed from head to foot in robes of gold and silver tissue. As she advanced, the water plashing from her white feet like a tide of silver, the chain which attached her to the Palace of Crystal, as she had promised the King of the Seas, might be seen shining brightly in the moonbeams. She carried in her dainty hand, a superb waistcoat that she had stitched for the Prince.

"Fanfan," said she, "my pretty Fanfan, open the door of the Castle very gently—"

But at this instant, the Prince, who had kept himself close hid under the bridge, rushed out at her, threw his own chain round her, and cut with the sickle the links of that which bound her. She wanted to fly; she changed herself into a squirrel; into a bird; into a beetle. All to no purpose. The Prince was firm, as the wise widow had warned him, and did not trouble himself about any of these transformations; so at last, the beautiful Selma, all panting and blushing, was obliged to surrender herself.

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "alas! that frightful Senjata will cut my throat!"

"Don't fear anything of the kind," replied the Prince, with the air of one used to command. "Do you stay, I pray you, until to-morrow, here, with the good widow. To-morrow she shall have ceased to live; to-morrow your brother shall be freed!"

This was a tolerably strong promise on the part of the Prince, considering, in the first place, that the lady to be got out of the way so speedily was his wife; and secondly, that she was herself a witch. But what is impossible to true love?

As soon as he had partaken of supper with the fair Selma, and Good Widow, and made sure that the beautiful Bride of the Sea (though such no longer) was snugly sleeping in a warm bedroom under a strong roof on solid ground for the rest of the night, in place of a cold crystal palace at the bottom of the sea, he bade farewell to the Wise Widow, and mounting his horse, returned to his palace in an excellent good-humour, whistling, and singing, and smoking his cigar, as he rode along.

On entering the castle, he enquired whether her Royal Highness had retired to rest; and on receiving news to that effect, which seemed rather to add to his feelings of satisfaction, he ordered his servants to dig a hole three feet deep in the bath room, which, at the proper time, was filled with melted pitch, and covered over with a handsome carpet.

In the morning, Senjata rose and walked along majestically into the bath-room to take her bath, scolding her maids of honour very soundly as she went. She had just ordered them, in her pride, not to walk so close to her, "as she was not fond of contact with common people," when — she put her foot on the carpet, and fell into the hole full of burning pitch, where she was suffocated.

The marriage of the Prince and the beautiful Selma, was celebrated with great pomp. On coming to the throne, His Majesty named his brother-in-law, Tuvni (who had been several years at school in the mean while), Prime Minister; and as for the pretty Fanfan, he was carried to the wedding in a golden carriage, and appointed Master of the Bones to the Royal Dog Kennel, for the rest of his days, with two Deputy Assistants to do his business, his only labour being to lie on a crimson cushion at his mistress' feet on state occasions, and receive a handsome salary which was paid weekly for his better accommodation.



THE TOUCH OF GOLD.

ONCE upon a time, there was a very rich man; and he was also a King and was called Midas. He had a little daughter, whom we never remember to have heard any one mention but ourselves; and if we even knew her name, we have completely forgotten it; but as fanciful names are pretty things for little girls, suppose we call her Marygold.

This King Midas loved gold beyond everything. He held by his royal crown, chiefly because it was made of that precious metal. If there was anything he liked, nearly in the same degree, it was the little daughter, who played so prettily at the steps of his throne.

Now, the more love Midas had for this child, the more he desired and sought after riches. He imagined, foolish man that he was, that the best thing to be done for this tender object of his affection, was to amass the greatest quantity of gold, yellow and shining, that had ever been heaped together since the beginning of the world.

To this object, all his thoughts were devoted and all his time. If his eyes were ever attracted by the golden clouds of sunset, it was only to wish that it was in his power to change them into real gold and lock them up in his coffers. As often as little Marygold ran towards him with a bunch of yellow broom or golden cowslips, he would say immediately, "Nonsense, my child, if these flowers were of the metal of which they are the colour, they would, indeed, be worth the trouble of gathering. . . ."

For all this, in his early youth, and before a passion so extravagant seized him, King Midas had shown a decided taste for flowers, and had planted a garden, on which grew roses, the prettiest and sweetest that ever gladdened the eyes or nose of mortal man. These roses still displayed garlands as fresh and as balmy as when Midas would spend whole hours in breathing their perfume. But now, if he looked at them, it was only to reckon up what they would be worth, if all their innumerable petals could be made so many plates of gold; moreover, in spite of his



passion, at one time, for music (whatever old stories may say about his ears being shaped on the model of those of an ass), poor Midas, at the time of our story, liked no music so much as the chink of his heaps of guineas.

At last, as he grew old (people often grow more and more foolish, instead of showing themselves wiser), Midas lost his common sense so far, as not to be able to endure the sight or the touch of anything that was not made of gold. Of course he had, on this account, to pass the greatest part of every day in a dismal apartment, situated on the walls of his palace. It was here that he kept his treasures; and, whenever he felt a desire to enjoy some little happiness, Midas would betake himself to this den, which was scarcely better than that of a prison. After carefully locking the door, he would take up a bag full of gold, some cup of the same metal, an enormous ingot, or a bag of gold-dust, and carry them into the obscure corners of the chamber to the single ray of the sun that slipped in through the narrow loop-hole. This ray was dear to him; but merely because it gave to his treasure a brilliant and clear reflection. Then would he empty the sacks, count his guineas, toss the ingot up in the air and catch it again in his hands; filter the shining gold-dust through his fingers, and watch the fantastic image of himself reflected at the bottom of the cup, muttering all the while in a low tone, "O Midas, fortunate King Midas! happy mortal that you are." Nothing could be droller than to see the grimacing smiles which his own face, reflected in the cup, gave in return for this admiration.

One might have said that this image, comprehending the folly of its original, was turning him into ridicule, and unceremoniously laughing in the face of the royal pantaloon.

However happy he might think himself, Midas, in the midst of all his good fortune, felt there was something wanting. He could never be perfectly satisfied unless he had the entire world as the place of deposit for his riches, and filled it throughout with shining metal, of which he wished to be the sole proprietor.

There is no need to recall to the minds of learned

young ladies and gentlemen, such as our pretty readers, that at the remote epoch in which King Midas reigned, many things happened which would, now-a-days, appear incredible to us; just as a great number of things we actually witness to-day would never have been credited by the people of that period. Taken as a whole, perhaps, our own time is the most wonderful of the two. But let us go on with our story.

One day Midas had given himself up to the enjoyment of his usual contemplation in his treasury, when he perceived a shadow fall on his heaps of gold; and suddenly distinguished, by the brightness of a body of light that diffused itself through his den, the form of a stranger. He was a young man, of a bright and open countenance. Could it be an effect of King Midas's imagination, that made all objects seem tinged with his favourite colour; or was it some other cause, that made him fancy the smile of the stranger had, as it were, a metallic lustre beaming from it. Certain it was, that although the form of the stranger intercepted the light from the exterior, the treasures heaped up before him sparkled, in spite of this, with a lightness they never had before; every corner of each golden coin, however obscure, shone out, and profited by the smile and the look of the stranger, from which rays of light and fire seemed to sparkle.

Midas, certain of having turned the key in the lock, felt convinced that no human person could make a way into his retreat by force; and so came, necessarily, to the conclusion, that his visitor was more than mortal.

It is of no importance to explain to you who this mysterious personage was. At that period, when the earth was yet near the time of its infancy, certain beings, possessed of supernatural powers, were believed to come down and dwell there, partly by way of frolic and partly from more serious motives, sharing in the joys and sorrows of mankind. A meeting of this nature was nothing new to King Midas; nor was he at all put out at finding himself face to face with one of these superior beings, as he had often seen them before. To say the truth, the unknown had an air so benevolent, and what is

more, so generous, that it would have been out of all reason to suspect him of any evil intention. So Midas, as he rattled the money in his pockets, reckoned to a certainty, that his superhuman guest had come to bless him with additional favours ; and what other favour was it possible to bestow upon him, except some gift that would multiply his riches ?

The stranger cast his eyes around the chamber, lighting up with his smile, as he did so, all the objects there collected, then turning to Midas, " You are powerfully rich," he said. " I doubt whether anywhere in the earth there is so much cash and plate within four walls, as you seem to have amassed here."

" I have been tolerably successful," replied Midas, with an air of not overrating his property ; " but, after all, there is nothing very surprising in this, when you consider how hard I have had to work all my life to arrive at it. If a man could live a thousand years, and be lucky as well, then, indeed, he might have some chance of being really wealthy."

" How is this ?" exclaimed the stranger. " Are you not content, then ?"

Midas shook his head.

" What, then is there that would satisfy you ?" asked the unknown. " I should like to know, simply from curiosity."

Midas was silent, and became thoughtful. A presentiment came over him, that this stranger of so noble an aspect, and with a smile of such benevolent expression, must have come there with the object and the power of gratifying all his wishes. He remained absorbed in meditation, heaping up imaginary mountains of gold, one on the other, without ever reaching in his dreams a height sufficient. At last, a bright idea occurred to King Midas, which seemed to him even as brilliant as the metal he so idolised.

Raising his head suddenly, he looked up in the dazzling face of the stranger.

" Well, Midas," said the Unknown ; " you have, at last, I see, discovered something that will satisfy you. Tell me what it is you would suggest ?"

"Simply this," replied the avaricious man; "I am tired of having so much trouble in getting together wealth, which, after all my exertion, is, to say the truth, very insufficient; I wish, therefore, to be able to change into gold all I touch."

The smile of the stranger expanded, at this point, to such a degree, that it appeared to fill the whole chamber, just like the orb of day crossing a dark valley, where the leaves of autumn reflect back its light.

"The Touch or Gold! Is it not so;" he exclaimed. "All honour to thee, King Midas, for conceiving so admirable an idea! But do you feel quite sure that the fulfilment of this wish will render you happy?"

"How can it be otherwise?"

"Will you never regret having obtained this marvellous gift?"

"What reason can I have to repent it? I shall then want nothing more to fill up the measure of my happiness."

"Very well, then; your wish shall be granted," replied the unknown, as he waved an adieu. "To-morrow, at the rising of the sun, you will possess the Touch of Gold."

While saying these words, the countenance of his visitor became so resplendent, that Midas involuntarily closed his eyes. On opening them, nothing was to be seen but the one ray of the sun, that fell upon the treasures he had heaped up with so much trouble during the whole period of his existence.

Did Midas sleep as well as usual, that night? History gives us no information on the point. Asleep or awake, there is little doubt his spirit was all alive, like that of a child to whom some one has promised a magnificent toy to-morrow. However this might be, scarcely had day tipped the tops of the hills, than King Midas, thoroughly awake, was stretching his arms out of bed, and beginning to place his hands on everything within his reach, in his impatience to make sure of his really possessing the Touch of Gold, as the stranger had promised. He laid his hand on the chair by his bedside, and on different articles of furniture,



but what was his disappointment, at seeing all these articles still preserve their former substance. A fear came over his soul. Was that radiant personage, then, but a vain dream? or had he been making a laughing-stock of him? And what a pitiable disenchantment, if, after such great hopes, he should be obliged to content himself with the little gold laboriously amassed by the ordinary means, in place of creating it by mere touch!

Midas, in his impatience, had not observed that the doubtful light which shone in his chamber was due solely to the dawn that was beginning to open the gates of heaven. He fell back on his couch, in despair at having seen his illusions vanish, and was growing more and more sad, when, suddenly, a beam of light penetrated through the lattice, and gilded the ceiling over his head. It seemed to Midas, that this ray produced a singular reflection on the white coverlid of his bed. On looking closer at it, what was his surprise and happiness, at the sight of his linen sheets converted into tissues of the purest gold! He had attained the Touch of Gold at the precise hour announced by his mysterious visitor.

Almost beside himself with joy, Midas hurried from his chamber, touching everything that fell under his hands. He caught hold of one of the bed posts, and it became instantly a fluted column of gold. He drew back the curtain from a window for the purpose of more clearly seeing the marvels he had accomplished, and the tassel grew heavy, at the contact, in a lump of massive gold. He touched a book that lay on the table; the book assumed the appearance of a volume splendidly bound and gilt edged, such as one often sees; but on turning the pages over, with the tip of his finger, it soon became a collection of thin plates of gold, on which whatever had been written, had become illegible. He hastened to put on his clothes, and was in ecstasies at seeing himself invested with magnificent habits made of cloth of gold, yet preserving all their softness, in spite of the weight of the stuff. He drew from his pocket a handkerchief that his little Marygold had hemmed for him; the handkerchief instantly assumed a brilliancy it never had before; the whole of it, every

thread — even the little stitches that the charming child had put in so neatly — all were turned into gold. This last transformation did not seem to be entirely pleasing to King Midas; he would rather have preserved as it was, this handkerchief, which his little child had climbed up his knees to place in his hand.

But, after all, that was a trifle not worth teasing himself about. Midas then took up his spectacles, and put them on his nose to see better what he was doing. At this time, it is only right to say, spectacles had not been invented for common people, but existed for the use of sovereigns solely. If this had not been the case, how could Midas possibly have had a pair of them? However, to his great confusion, he found that, excellent as were his spectacles, and by a first-rate maker, he could not distinguish anything with them. Yet this was the most natural thing in the world, since in taking these out of his pocket the two transparent glasses were suddenly changed into small plates of yellow metal. All the utility of the spectacles had gone, in spite of an increase in the value of the material of which they were made. This circumstance struck Midas as a very awkward one; since with all his wealth he could never more possess a pair of spectacles, that he could see through.

"It is not a great affair, after all," he said to himself, with stoical resignation. "Great advantages have always their attendant inconveniences. The gift of a Touch of Gold is well worth the sacrifice of a pair of spectacles, that is supposing one does not lose one's sight. My eyes will serve me for all the ordinary needs of life, and my little daughter will soon be old enough to read to me."

The sage King Midas felt so exalted by his good fortune that his palace was not large enough to hold him. Full of enthusiasm, he walked down from his apartments, and smiling with satisfaction as he observed how every balustrade of the staircase was transmuted into burnished gold, according as his hand slid along the rail. He lifted the latch of the door (lately of simple steel, but transformed, like the rest, at mere contact with his fingers), and walked sharply into his garden, where he knew there was a great

number of roses in full bloom, and others half blown, or fast budding. The morning breeze was balmy with their perfume. Nothing in the world is more delicious and agreeable than their varied tints, the grace, the modesty, the tranquillity and beauty that seemed to exhale from these roses.

But Midas knew how to render them much more precious in his eyes, and took great trouble in running from rose-bush to rose-bush, exercising his magic gift with unweared activity, until every flower, every bud, the very hearts hidden in their inmost bosoms, were changed into gold.

While busying himself with this occupation, King Midas was called in to breakfast; and the keen air of the morning, and his brisk exercise in running, having sharpened his appetite, he lost no time in re-entering the house.

We are by no means sure about what, at this particular period, constituted the breakfast of a King, and we have not time to be very particular in our researches into the subject, nevertheless, there is good reason for stating, that on this particular day, the breakfast in question was composed of hot rolls, a dish of fried trout, with potatoes in their jackets, fresh eggs, and coffee for King Midas, and a basin of bread and milk for his daughter. In any case, such a breakfast is not a bad one for a King, and if the bill of fare is not set down exactly right, Midas did not have a better.

The Little Marygold had not yet come down. Her father had her called; and sitting down to the table, waited the coming of the child before commencing his own repast. Midas really loved his daughter; and his affection was really more lively than usual this morning, on account of the great good fortune that had befallen him. On a sudden, he heard her coming along the corridor, shedding tears, a circumstance that greatly surprised him, for Marygold was as merry a child as ever was seen, and one who in a whole year did not shed tears enough to fill a thimble. On hearing her cry, Midas conceived an idea of consoling her by some agreeable surprise; so he leant over the table,

touched the bowl containing her milk (a piece of fine porcelain, ornamented with exquisite paintings), and changed it into gold. Marygold pushed the door open gently, and entered, sobbing as if her heart would break, with her little pinafore held up to her eyes.

"What is this, my poor little dear," cried her father; "what is the matter now, and on such a fine morning, too?"

Marygold, without taking her pinafore from her eyes, held out her hand to show Midas one of the roses he had transformed.

"Is it not magnificent?" said he; "what's the matter with that beautiful rose, that vexes you so much?"

"Ah, my dear Papa!" replied the child, as soon as she recovered the power of speech, "this rose is no longer a pretty one, it is as ugly a rose as ever was seen! I ran into the garden, as soon as I was dressed, to cull you a fine nosegay, because I know how fond you are of flowers, and that you like them the better, when your little daughter has picked them for you. But, oh my dear Papa, do you know what has happened? Such a misfortune! All our roses, that had such a lovely scent, and such bright, pretty colours, all of them are faded, all of them quite spoilt; they have become all yellow, and without any scent whatever. What can be the reason?"

"Pooh! pooh! pretty one, don't cry about that," said Midas, too much ashamed to own himself guilty of having operated a change that made her so unhappy. "Sit down and eat your bread and milk, my child. It will be very easy for you to exchange a fine rose of gold, such as this, that will last many hundred years, for a rose of the common sort, that fades in a single day."

"Those are the roses for me," exclaimed Marygold, as she threw the one she held from her with disdain; "this one has not the least perfume, and its sharp leaves prick my nose."

The child sat down to table; but her mind was so full that she did not even notice the wonderful transformation of her china basin, which was so much the better, as Marygold was in the habit of amusing herself with the

outlandish figures, the houses and the trees of strange form, painted on the bowl, all of which had completely disappeared in the uniform tint of the metal.

Meanwhile, the King had poured himself out a cup of coffee. The coffee-pot underwent an immediate transformation at the moment he touched it. Midas thought, in his mind, a breakfast off a service of gold would be a tolerable extravagance in a man like himself of simple habits, and began to devise some means for taking care of his treasures. A corner cupboard and a kitchen-safe seemed hardly the places for holding coffee-pots and cups of such great value.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he carried to his mouth a saucer of coffee; and, as he supped up the contents, was seized with surprise, at feeling, just when the liquid touched his lips, it was transformed into a metallic substance, and hardened into a small ingot.

"Oh!" cried Midas, with a shudder.

"What is the matter, Papa?" asked Marygold, looking at him with surprise, her eyes still bathed in tears.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," said Midas. "Don't let your milk get cold."

He lifted on to his plate one of the small trout, that looked so tempting; and, as if to make an experiment, touched its tail with the tip of his finger. With a shudder, he saw before him, in place of a trout admirably cooked, nothing more than a fish of gold. Would it had been one of those red fish kept in globes of glass as a curiosity in dining-rooms. But it was not; it was a fine fish in metal, such as would be pronounced artistically chiselled by the cleverest goldsmith in the world. Its scales were changed to a filagree of gold; its fins and tail to folds of the same metal. There was the very touch of the fork, that very look of delicacy and lightness of a fish just fried by the hands of a master. A true master-piece. But, at the moment, Midas would have better liked a real trout in his dish than such an imitation of one, however precious.

"I really don't know," thought he, "how I shall make a breakfast."

He took up one of the small rolls, still smoking, and, having broken it, not without some trouble, was greatly mortified at seeing it coloured with the yellow hue of a cake made of maize. To tell the truth, had the roll been made of maize flour, Midas would have been better pleased than he was, when, by the weight and solidity of the mass in his hand, he found that it was nothing but a roll of gold. In despair he seized an egg, which immediately underwent a transmutation, similar to those of the trout and the roll.

"This won't do," said the King. "Here I am, then, in a nice fix," as he turned in his chair, and regarded with envious eyes, the little Marygold bravely dipping her bread into her milk, "to have before me a breakfast of such great value, and not be able to eat anything!"

In the hope that with the aid of address and quickness he might succeed in avoiding the serious inconvenience that so greatly disquieted him, King Midas seized hold of a smoking hot potato, and attempted to slip it cunningly into his mouth, and swallow it at one move. But the gift of the Touch of Gold had a power of instantaneous action superior to his will. He felt himself being choked, not by a potato but by a hot lump that so burnt his tongue as to make him cry out with pain. He hastened away from the table, and betook himself to leaping and stamping about the room with pain and fright.

"Papa, my dear papa!" exclaimed Marygold, who was as affectionate as she was pretty; "what is the matter with you; tell me, I implore you? Have you burnt yourself?"

"Ah, my dear child," replied Midas, with a groan, "I don't know what your poor father can do!"

And, in truth, we may ask our dear young friends, if they ever before heard of so lamentable a condition as this of King Midas? He had, then, a breakfast, literally, the most magnificent that could be set before a King; and it was this very magnificence that made it completely useless. The poorest traveller seated at table with a crust of bread and a glass of water, was, assuredly, better off than Midas; the delicate meats, set before whom, were really worth

their weight in gold. And what was he to do ? He was already hungry enough to devour any kind of food. What would he be at dinner time ; and if he were not starved to death by supper time, of which there seemed scarcely a doubt, how could he appease his appetite with viands, so very difficult of digestion ? How many days do you suppose he could survive on a diet, not only so rich but so substantial ?

Reflections of this sad character so strongly troubled the mind of Midas, that he was just at the point of asking himself whether opulence was the only good thing to be wished for in the world, or even, whether it was the most desirable. This, however, was only a passing notice. Fascinated by the glitter of the gold, he would have still refused to give up his Touch of Gold, for a consideration so pitiful as that of his breakfast. Figure to yourselves, young people, the value of such a sacrifice. It would have cost him millions upon millions to have had a fried trout, a boiled egg, a potato, a roll, and a cup of coffee. Nevertheless, he was so hungry, and his uneasiness was so great, that he never ceased groaning very loudly, and in a most pitiable manner. Our sweet little Marygold could not keep away from him any longer. With her eyes fixed on her father, she sought, with all the power of her young understanding, to make out what had happened to him ; and at last, yielding to her affectionate anxiety, she quitted her chair, ran to Midas, and passed her arms tenderly round his knees. He kissed and embraced her, as he felt bitterly how many thousand times more the love of his little girl was worth to him, than all he could ever gain from the supernatural power with which he was now gifted.

“ Dear baby, my fond one,” he exclaimed.

But Marygold replied not. Alas ! what had he done ? What fatal gift had the stranger bestowed upon him ? The moment his lips lightly brushed the child’s forehead, a transformation was effected. Marygold’s face, always fresh, so full of grace and tenderness, assumed a yellow shining hue ; the tears stiffened on her cheeks, and the beautiful brown curls, that fell over her shoulders, lost



their suppleness and colour. Her graceful body stiffened, and were metallised under her father's lips. Oh, unhappiness and despair! Victim of that man's insatiable passion for riches, his Marygold was now nothing but a statue of gold!!!

Her fixed eyes still wore their look of disquiet and entreaty; an expression of love, of grief, and of pity remained impressed on her motionless countenance, and she was at once a sight the most lovely and the most distracting to contemplate: there were all the traits of Marygold, in the slightest details, even to the delicious little dimple marked on her pretty chin. But the more striking the resemblance, the greater her father's despair and his affliction as he looked upon this golden image—all that remained to him, alas! of his poor Marygold. Every time he wished to express his paternal tenderness for her, Midas had been in the habit of saying she was worth her weight in gold. This phrase had become, at last, an absolute truth; and the unhappy father recognised, when too late, how much greater was the worth of a tender and affectionate heart, than all the wealth in the world!

We must not pain you with the recital. Poor Midas, a man with every desire fully gratified, set to ringing his hands and lamenting, being neither able to endure the sight of his child, nor to turn his gaze from her; for he could not credit the reality, in all its horror, unless his eyes were fixed on this touching transformation. All the time, too, he imagined he could see that lovely little face, down the cheeks of which trickled a tear of massive gold, and which wore an air of such compassionate tenderness, express a wish to soften the metal that bound it, and recover the suppleness and transparency of its former state. This, however, was impossible. All Midas could do, was to tear his hair, and pronounce himself the most miserable man in the whole world; since the loss of his whole treasures could not bring back a rosy tint, the very slightest hue, to the cheeks of his dear child.

While thus a prey to distraction and despair, he suddenly perceived, standing at the door, the mysterious

stranger. The head of Midas sank upon his breast—he did not offer a word, as he recognised the same figure that had appeared to him the evening previous, while in the midst of his treasures, and from whom he had received the terrible gift of the Touch of Gold. The expression of the stranger's face still expanded into a smile, and a yellow haze diffused itself through the whole chamber, over all the objects transformed by Midas' touch, and especially over the image of little Marygold.

"Well, my good friend, tell me, I pray you, how do you find your Touch of Gold act?"

"I am thoroughly wretched ;" cried the King.

"Thoroughly wretched ! How does that happen ? Have I not faithfully kept my promise ? Have you not got the power to realise all your wishes ?"

"Gold is not everything in the world ; I have lost the main object of all my wishes ;" replied Midas.

"Ah, ah ! this is a discovery you have made since yesterday. Well, well, let us see what can be done. Which of two things do you consider best ; the gift of the Touch of Gold, or a cup of water, cool and clear ?"

"Oh ! the water ; it is a blessing !" exclaimed Midas ; "but it will never again refresh my parched throat."

"The Touch of Gold," went on the stranger, "or a crust of dry bread ?"

"One morsel of bread is worth all the gold in the earth."

"The Touch of Gold, or your little Marygold, full of life, grace and affection, as she was only one hour ago ?"

"Oh, my child—my dear child !" cried the poor king, and again he wrung his hands. "I would not have given merely the little dimple on her chin, for the power of making the entire globe into a massive block of that precious metal."

"You are a wiser man than you were yesterday," said the unknown, as he regarded Midas with a grave look. "Your heart, I perceive, is not yet quite reduced to the condition of an ingot. You seem to be still capable of understanding how the ordinary things of life, such as are in the hands of all the world, have a higher value than

those riches after which so many greedy men sigh so ardently. Come, then; do you really desire to be rid of this Touch of Gold?"

"It is hateful to me," replied Midas.

Just then a fly happened to plant itself on his nose, and fell down immediately to the earth; for the insect became changed into gold. Midas shuddered with terror.

"Very well," said the stranger. "Go, plunge into the stream that flows at the bottom of your garden. Bring with you, at the same time, a vessel of its water, and sprinkle it over all the objects you wish to restore to their original substance. If you fulfil these instructions with confidence, you may possibly repair the misery you have brought about by your cupidity."

The Monarch bowed low. When he raised his head the brilliant apparition had vanished.

You can readily understand that Midas did not delay one minute. He instantly seized hold of a large earthen jar (but this jar, alas, became no longer of earth, at his touch) and ran to the spot pointed out. As he trotted along briskly, opening himself a way through bushes and underwood, it was wonderful to see the leaves turn yellow, as if autumn had passed over them by this path only. Having reached the bank of the stream, he threw himself in head downwards, without even the precaution of taking off his shoes.

"Pouf! Pouf! Pouf!" he came up, blowing as he raised his head out of the water. "Here is a delicious, refreshing bath. I hope it will have quite disengaged me of that touch of gold." And he hastened to fill his pitcher.

As he dipped it in the water, his heart throbbed with pleasure at seeing the good, honest, clay pitcher change itself again, and recover its primitive nature. Midas had a consciousness beyond this, that a change had been operated in himself; his bosom had thrown off a crushing, icy weight. Without doubt his heart had, little by little, lost its human substance, and become transmuted into an insensible and metallic organ; but it had now become softened and made gentle as a true heart of flesh. Perceiving a violet on the river bank, Midas touched it with a finger,

and was overwhelmed with joy, on assuring himself that this delicate little flower preserved its natural shade, instead of assuming a yellow shining tint. The accursed Touch-of-Gold had then really left him.

King Midas returned, with all speed, to his palace. His domestics, we suppose, were very much amazed at seeing their royal master, carrying, with such evident care, a simple crock of water. But this water, that was to repair all the mischief caused by the extravagance of Midas, had for him a higher value than an ocean of molten gold. There was no delay, on his part, you may be sure, in sprinkling the metal figure of his Marygold.

You would have smiled to see, from the same instant, as the water touched the dear child, how the roses animated her little cheeks, and how she sneezed and puffed out the water, some of which had got into her mouth. When she came to herself, it was to find she was thoroughly wet through, and her father still throwing water at her with all his might.

"Oh ! my dear Papa, have done, I beg of you," she cried. "See, I am quite wet through, and so is this pretty frock, that I put on this morning for the first time!" For having known nothing of her having been a little statue of gold, she remembered nothing, from the moment when she hastened forward, with open arms, to comfort poor King Midas.

He, too, did not think it necessary to tell his beloved child the folly he had committed; but contented himself with shewing how much wiser he had grown. To this effect, he led Marygold out into the garden, where he made a general sprinkling with the rest of the water, with such success that more than a thousand of the roses recovered their primitive freshness.

Two circumstances, however, recalled to Midas's memory, as long as he lived, this famous gift of the Touch-of-Gold. First, that the sand of the river and shore were like gold dust; another, that the hair of his daughter had upon it a tint such as he had not remarked previous to his giving her the kiss that had caused her change of form. This alteration in shade was, in reality, an addi-

tional beauty; and the curls of Marygold had a brilliancy they never before possessed.

King Midas, when he had come to be an old grandfather, took delight in relating this marvellous story to Marygold's children, when he used to make them jump on his knees, and would tell it almost in the same words, as we have now repeated to you; then he passed his fingers through their silken curls, and said that their hair still preserved the golden reflection they had caught from their mother.

"And to hide nothing from you, my pretty little dears," Midas would go on, all the while keeping the children on the gallop or trot with his knees, "I have never been able, since that day, to endure the sight of anything of the colour of gold, except that of your beautiful bright tresses."

THE KING OF DIAMONDS.

I.

JACK THE HEARTLESS.

ONCE upon a time, there was a man so greedy after money and pleasure, that he stopped at nothing to gratify his passion. Seduced by an appetite for gain, and led away by wicked connexions, he sought, in gambling, a resource and remedy for his desperate fortunes.

The first time he played he was unlucky enough to win, and thenceforth gave himself up entirely to an amusement that soon became his serious occupation, and brought him a fertile crop of anxieties. Fortune, however, which thus far had been favourable, ended by turning round against him. In the attempt to recover his losses, he lost again. He betted furiously against his luck. All his fortune went at one game; and what is more, this bad conduct occa-

sioned his losing a situation, in which he might have lived respectably, but which he neglected for the indulgence of his detestable passion. His name was Jack, but he soon came to be nicknamed THE HEARTLESS.

Behold him, then, ruined, yet still perpetually dreaming of the thousands he expected to win at play. As he could no longer borrow any money, he had recourse to fraud to obtain it; a point to which bad passions always conduct men. Thenceforth he thought of little else than cheating at play, or winning by making some important card sure to come into his hand.

One day, he was sitting alone in his chamber, with his door double-locked to ensure privacy, and a pack of cards in his hands, totally absorbed in finding out some sure trick. He shuffled and cut the cards, drew them out one by one, then made them interchange rapidly, in such a manner as to bring any one just where he wanted it, without observation. But it seemed as if he could not accomplish the trick; for he grew vexed, stamped his foot on the ground, and exclaimed, from time to time, "No, that is not it!" Then he would begin again, and each time repeat; "A bad twist, that; they would detect the cheating." At last he rose in a rage, tore up the cards and threw them into the fire, accompanying the action with a dreadful oath.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in a frenzy; "I would give twenty years of my life in this world and the next, to be master of a good trick at cards."

The words were scarcely out of his lips, when the door opened. He turned round, surprised and almost affrighted, for he was sure he had turned the key. At this moment, he saw a singular-looking personage come in. He was a man of middle height, lean and angular, with a forehead narrow and long in the shape of a pear; two small piercing eyes, a hook nose, shrivelled lips, a pointed chin, fingers long and crooked, like claws or hooks, and such an air; withal, of ease and assurance, that the gambler was so struck by it, as never to think of asking who he was, or by what right he had so unceremoniously entered the room. This strange visitor advanced towards Jack, with a smile of

mockery ; and, fixing his little, sharp and twinkling eyes on him—

“ My friend,” said he, “ you are a fool.”

Jack, in a rage, lifted his hand to strike him ; but the other, without seeming to care for it, stretched out his lean arm and bony fingers towards him, and went on in a distinct voice.

“ Yes ; you are a fool ! I have come here expressly to tell you so. O, you need not put yourself out about it ! ” he added, seeing an angry movement on the part of the gambler. “ That would be another foolery, and, what is worse, a useless one.”

Then he drew near, with a mysterious air; keeping, all the while, a penetrating glance fixed on Jack, who recoiled from him under the influence of some vague terror. But the Unknown still pressed forwards, and, at last, stooping down to his ear :—

“ Is it not always a folly,” he whispered, “ to throw down the game and burn the cards ? ”

Then, without awaiting a reply, he turned towards the hearth on which the cards were burning, took them out of the fire, one after the other, without seeming in the slightest degree to burn his fingers, packed them together, half consumed as they were, then blew upon them, and threw them up suddenly in the air.

“ Pick up those cards,” said he, “ and let us look at them.”

Our gambler hesitated to obey, and was inclined to turn out his insolent visitor. But a secret terror seized him at the aspect of the man, and he felt, under his look, as the bird does under the eye of the serpent. He stooped down in spite of himself to pick up the cards, and was much astonished at finding them all uninjured.

“ Who, then, are you ? ” he said in amazement.

“ What does it matter, provided I can be useful to you ? ”

“ In what way ? ”

“ Men say you are a great gambler.”

“ A great one, possibly ; but an unlucky one certainly.”

“ Say a fool—for such is the name I gave you, and



such is the name that fits you. No man can be unlucky who has a clever mind, full of turns and tricks, and who is not afraid to play off some of those little games which the vulgar call impostures, frauds, and the like hard-names. Let us see; as you are such a fine player, sit down there at the table. Let us have a game.

"I can't. I have got nothing to stake."

"Eh! who asked you for money?"

"What would you play for, then?"

"Did you not say, just now, 'I would give twenty years of my life in this world and the next—'"

"Pish!"

"To know—"

"Speak lower."

"O very well, my poor young man; you are even more of a fool than I thought you were. You repent the only good idea you have ever had in your whole life. On consideration, I should be quite as great a fool myself, to serve a man against his own wish. As you desire to continue a ruined man; as the situation is such an agreeable one for you that you refuse to make a fortune in a few months, larger than any within your knowledge, I leave you, and I wish you good luck."

So saying, he rose and walked twice round the chamber, crying out, "Ruined! ruined! ruined!" interrupting himself at each word with a shout of laughter. Then, directing his steps towards the door, halted and turned back, as to give time for his host to reply. That brief moment, as he well knew, sufficed for the evil passions to assert their sway.

In fact, those words, "Ruined! ruined!" coupled with the others, "make a large fortune in a few months," rang in Jack's ears with a fatal effect.

When he saw the stranger on the point of leaving, he rose from his seat, and exclaimed,

"Stop! I accept your terms."

II.

THE MAGIC CARD.

A SMILE of malicious joy flitted over the lips of the Unknown, as he again took a seat at the table.

"Now then," he asked, "what do you wish me to stake against your twenty years?"

"Oh, don't take so literally," replied Jack, "the words I let fall in my despair."

"You go from them, then."

"No; but I don't intend to play for more than ten years, and those I will stake one at a time."

"Poor man! however, let it be so. What do you want against your one year?"

"Fifty pounds."

"I will give you five hundred. Let us begin."

At these words the Unknown shuffled the cards, dealt them, and turned up the King.

Now, it must be known that the game at which they were playing is called *Ecarté*; that whoever marks five first, wins the game; and that every time the King is turned up after dealing, the player who deals it marks one; so that a sharper, who can play tricks and juggle with the cards, turning up what he pleases, as the conjurors do, has a great advantage over an honest adversary in this particular game. We now understand how the Unknown came to be so very lucky, as Jack thought he was, in turning up the King at first hand.

"One point for me," said he.

Jack looked at his own hand. He had not one good card in it. As he had the right to propose, that is, to require other cards, he made this demand of his adversary.

"Oh! certainly;" replied that worthy: and he gave him five fresh cards.

"I propose again," said Jack, seeing that the new cards so generously given him, were even worse than those he had before.

Now, we must explain that this "proposing," as it is called, is another curious point in this singular game of *ecarté*; as each person may take fresh cards until the pack is out, unless his adversary object, such objection not being allowed, however, at the first hand dealled out unless under penalty of the loss of one point extra, should the objector not succeed in taking three out of the five tricks.

Jack wanted better cards, and thought they were in the pack, so he proposed, as we see, a second time.



"As often as you please, my dear," replied his adversary; and, while Jack was looking at his cards, he held the rest of the pack in his hand, ready to deal him more fresh cards, as if certain that those he had given were good for nothing.

In fact, Jack proposed again. The whole pack was exhausted. To play was then inevitable. The Unknown won the first hand. The second was as quickly terminated.

"You owe me one year," said he; "let us go on for another."

The second game and the second year were won with like rapidity. They went on.

Jack had always a bad hand ; and, as a consequence, always lost. The ten games were rapidly won by his adversary.

He was in despair. What made him most angry was, that whatever chance he might have of proposing, he never had a good card in his hand.

" You can't always go on in this fine way," said his adversary to him, " let us keep on; perhaps the chance will turn in your favour."

" No," said Jack, disgusted with himself.

" Wait awhile. I offer to play you now for fifty thousand pounds against ten years; and, what is more, if I lose, I will let you off all you owe me. I hope you see this is a good game; and, at one stroke, you recover the years you have lost, and become a rich man to boot. Fifty thousand pounds! Fifty thousand pounds! You know what a fine fortune that is; and in two minutes you may win it."

The temptation was a strong one. Jack sought, however, to resist it; but his efforts were feeble. Once on the declivity of vice, we slide down rapidly. " Ruined!" said he, " ruined! and two minutes may repair all." Then he cast his eyes on the cards as they lay spread out on the table, and his fingers seemed ready to clutch them. He heard still, it is true, in his inmost heart, a voice which said, " We can't redeem one fault by committing another;" but his avarice stifled this voice. He sat down, without saying a word, at the gaming table, and commenced. Could he have seen the face of his adversary at the moment, he would have paused; so malignant and hideous was the joy that shone in that meagre and sallow visage.

Jack won the first points. He began to have a hope; and his heart beat rapidly. But there his chance stopped; his adversary soon caught him up. They both marked four. There was now only one point wanting to either of them. It was the Unknown's deal. He took the cards; he cut them; he shuffled them; he made them leap about in his hands with incredible agility, then he dealt the hands, and ——— turned up the King!

"The game's mine!" he cried.

Jack, who had kept his eyes anxiously upon him, thought he saw that the last card, which decided the game, had come off the pack in an unusual fashion. Angry and desperate, he rose up in a rage.

"You have cheated me," he exclaimed; "you have played tricks."

The Unknown went off in a shout of laughter.

"Do you only just begin to find that out?" said he, with a mocking smile.

"And you! you avow it! wretch ——"

"You amaze me, my friend! Would you have me play in any other manner?"

Such impudence, such cruel mockery, were so surprising to Jack, that he remained dumb, with his eyes fixed on this man, who seemed to exercise the power of fascination over him. Then the thought that he was, all at once, cheated, ruined, and doomed to an early death, overwhelmed him with confusion: a cloud came before his sight; he lost all knowledge.

When he came again to his senses, he saw the Unknown seated by his side, holding in his hand a purse, in which he seemed to be dropping, as he counted them, pieces of money. But no gold or silver could be seen to fall from his finger, nor did any chink in the bottom of the purse, although it seemed to bulge out as if growing full.

"One, two, three," said he, each time opening his fingers; at twenty, he stopped and closed his purse.

"There go my twenty years," thought Jack, in a very dolorous mood.

The Unknown raised his eyes to him, "I have cheated you," he said; "and I am not sorry for it. But I am quite ready to repair any harm I have done you. Here, take this pack of cards; with it you are sure of always winning. You have nothing else to do, but substitute it adroitly for whatever pack of cards is given you to play with. You have now in your hands the means for your own fortune. Adieu! we shall see one another again."

"Let me know your name, at least?"

"The King of Diamonds," replied the Unknown, as he

took himself off, with a harsh grating laugh that resounded through the chamber, and set every pane in the window rattling.

III.

THE TWO VOICES.

ONCE master of this fatal instrument of gain, Jack began to consider how he ought to make use of it. A painful struggle arose, at the moment, within him. On the one side he saw poverty and probity ; on the other riches and dishonour. While plunged in these disquieting meditations, he fancied he heard a voice on his right speaking to him, and listened to it.

" You are still an honest man," said this voice ; " you can still remain so. Courage, Jack ; take courage and work."

He turned round to see who it was that spoke ; when another voice replied on his left.

" None of your false shame. Thou hast lost twenty years, enjoy what remains of thy life ; and to enjoy it, thou must have wealth."

" Thou hast lost twenty years," returned the voice on the right ; " repair that loss by employing the rest of thy days usefully."

" Pleasure, play, and airy joys," said the other on his left ; " these are the real business of life."

" You will have to cheat," replied the right-hand monitor ; " to bring dishonour on yourself, and ruin on honourable men."

" What of that," said the left voice quickly ; " provided that, during all the time, you have the enjoyment of every pleasure."

Jack listened with wonder ; but was unable to discover the two persons, who were thus speaking to him, one after the other. As leaning his head in his hand, he ruminated on his ruined condition, his eyes fell upon the pack of cards, lying on the table. Strange visions flitted past him. He saw piles of sovereigns rise up before his eyes ; tables laden with delicate dishes, delicious wines flowing in

bumpers—his eyes glistened. Meanwhile, the voices continued to speak to him.

“Who, then, are you,” he cried, rising from his seat.

“Thy Passion,” said the voice on the left, with emphasis; while, at the same time, the ring of money, chinking, sounded in his ears. His looks brightened up with desire; and he stretched out his hand, as if to seize upon this invisible money; while the voice on the right replied, as from a distance—

“Thy conscience!”

“Gold! give me gold!” he exclaimed. “Away, ye vain scruples! Be still, thou timid and importunate voice; let me enjoy my life. Let fools resign themselves to poverty; wealth and enjoyment are my choice! Come, my precious talisman,” he added, taking up the pack of cards; “thanks to you, I am about to live once more. Let us away together, my friend and my companion; you shall never quit me, so long as you will give me fortune.”

At these words he went forth.

IV.

THE GAMBLER.

JACK turned his steps towards a house where a number of players were in the habit of meeting, and where he had been a frequent visitor in former days. At his entrance the whole of the players rose with a hearty welcome,

“See! our hermit revisits the world,” said one.

“How have you possibly lived six months without play?” enquired another.

“At last!” exclaimed a third, “our party is complete.”

They introduced to him a constant visitor of this house, whom he had not seen, when he had been there previously. “He is,” said the gentleman, who made them known to each other, “a capital player, and an agreeable companion, and loses with, seemingly, as much gaiety as any other person wins.” He was called Frantz. Jack bowed to the new comer; but as he saluted him, he noticed a smile on his lips—a smile which he had seen somewhere before. He endeavoured to fix his memory to a point; but could

not recall where he had seen that face, that changing expression, and those piercing eyes.

The party sat down and began playing. At the first turn Jack felt afraid and waited for the second deal to substitute his own pack. He did this very timidly, and could not help colouring up. He won, and hastened to pass the pack on to his neighbour. Then, only, did he venture to cast his eyes around to make sure that no person had remarked the fraud he had committed. No countenance gave a sign, nor did any one seem to suspect his knavery. But in making his review, his eyes fell on the countenance of the unknown gentleman, who had been introduced to him ; and he felt a cold shudder run through all his limbs, as he remarked the mocking smile and malicious regard of this man.

"Where can I have seen his face," thought he ; "I recognise that smile ; I know that look ; but I try in vain to recollect where all these have appeared to me before."

Just at this moment, the cards came round to him : he won thrice in succession. He went on ; the luck was the same. His eagerness for gain effacing, by degrees, all his emotion and his fears, he increased his stake, and won again. He soon became inflamed at the sight of the pile of gold he had got together, and the cards flew about in his hands, as if of their own accord. All the players were surprised at his luck ; and he, excited, ardent, his eyes flashing, his hands trembling, was forgetting every scruple, and all reserve, when a sharp voice exclaimed : "Fool ! fool!" He stopped, and casting his eyes involuntarily on the mysterious personage, whom he so vainly endeavoured to remember, saw his eyebrows contracted in a dark frown, and his face pucker'd up with rage. He could not refrain from an impulse of secret terror, and stopped instantly, and passed the cards.

The play continued through the whole night, and Jack still had the same luck.

Among those engaged in play, was one of the companions of his childhood, named Sylvio. Having been boys at the same school, they still kept up their intimacy. Drawn in by his friend, Sylvio, little by little, became

plunged in that tide of feverish pleasures and terrible emotions, by which youth is worn out and intelligence destroyed. Young, ardent, generous, and loyal, he was loved by all, and especially by Jack. Unfortunately, he was almost always a loser; and, after the fashion of most gamblers, endeavoured to recover his losses by increasing his stakes. When his purse was exhausted, he played on credit; then he staked his property; and his estate. The unfortunate man lost everything. There only remained to him a diamond of great value; it was a family souvenir, and therefore held in great esteem by him. Carried away by the fury of gambling, and blinded by passion, he proposed to stake against Jack this last relic of his fortune.

At this proposal, remorse seized Jack's heart.

"How!" thought he, "shall I ruin my friend, and ruin him by fraud! Am I going to rob him of all his fortune?"

To rob! this was the first time such a word had crossed his thoughts. To win in such a manner was, in reality, equivalent to a robbery. The reflection tortured him. He wished to decline; but his adversary charged him with being afraid of losing, and wanting to carry off all he had won. Forced to accept the stake, the unhappy man endeavoured to replace on the table the cards for which he had substituted his own. But all eyes were upon him, as the stake was so important. He played therefore, and played in spite of himself; and he won. Sylvio uttered a shout of laughter, so strange, so desperate, as to fill Jack with alarm.

The day was on the point of dawning; the company rose, and the gamblers separated. Just as Jack went out, he heard some one whisper in his ear, "Capital." He turned round, and saw Frantz, who was walking off at a great pace.

V.

THE KNAVE OF HEARTS.

JACK kept on at this kind of life; but from fear of exciting suspicion at his so often winning from the same

persons, frequently changed the company in which he played, never appearing more than two or three times successively at the same house. Strange to say, he invariably met the same mysterious personage, who, everywhere, was introduced to him as "such a famous companion." Jack seldom heard him speak; and generally avoided being near him, as he felt a horror, at his presence, and an invincible repugnance to his vicinity. But he could not avoid turning his eyes upon this man, whenever he won a stake; and always saw him give a grin of satisfaction, so malignant as to make his very heart shiver.

Setting aside the inopportune apparition of this Unknown, who seemed to haunt his every step, Jack enjoyed a tolerably pleasant life. His good fortune at play brought him immense wealth. His house was regarded as the most sumptuous in the town. Domestics without number waited his orders, and carried out all his wishes; his table was served with an extraordinary luxury. "What a happy fellow," said every one every where. But when people spoke in this style in his hearing, his thoughts involuntarily reverted to that mysterious player, who was always present to his sight, and whom he had christened his Mysterious Persecutor. This thought poisoned his every enjoyment. He was strong against all other regrets. Ten young gentlemen, the sons of wealthy families, laid their ruin at his door, and he felt no remorse. The habit of cheating closed his heart to all pity. However rich he was already, his desire was to accumulate still greater riches.

Besides this, the passion for play had come upon him with a violence that permitted him no repose. As, however, people began to murmur against him, he resolved to take his departure for some other locality, carrying with him his spoils, plucked from so many imprudent persons.

Previous to doing this, he was desirous of playing a last game. There was, on the next day, a numerous assemblage of rich and famous players; and heavy sums would be laid out on the occasion. All the unfortunates, possessed by the fearful demon of play, had appointed to meet him there, and Jack could not fail them.

"This one night more," thought he, as he entered, "and I retire. I give over this dangerous life. Once more some winnings, and I fly far from this place. I am off to some unknown land to enjoy the fruits of my —"

He dared not finish the sentence—a word of disgraceful import rose to his lips. To banish this unpleasant reflection, he entered the house where the players were already assembled; a long table, covered with green cloth, occupied the middle of the apartment. Twenty chairs were arranged round this table, on which numerous packs of cards were placed. A profusion of wax candles shed a brilliant light over it, which was reflected in mirrors and in crystal lustres; so as to multiply itself on every side, and form sheaves of glittering brightness.

To his great pleasure, Jack observed Frantz was not there.

"Take your places, gentlemen," said the master of the house, as he seated himself."

Each man took his chair.

"There is only one gentleman absent," said a servant pointing to the seat opposite Jack.

"Leave the place empty," replied the master of the house; "perhaps some player may come in."

Jack turned his eyes on the chair designated; but withdrew them rapidly, with a movement of involuntary terror, as he saw Frantz sitting in that place which they all said was vacant. He remained, fascinated as it were, with the sight; his eyes fixed upon his persecutor; while that person, motionless and with his arms crossed, had the appearance of not perceiving what was going on around him; his visage was even more pale than usual, and his looks wore an imperious rigidity. Our unfortunate Jack, not knowing what to think of this vision, asked himself if the other guests had their vision obscured, or whether he was befooled by some dream. Such was his bewilderment, that he neither dared to make a remark or question any one about it.

The play began; the close attention given to which by Jack, by degrees restored his self-possession; so that when the cards came round to him, he had no other thought

but that of slipping adroitly on the table the pack he always carried about him. He won ; and then could not refrain from throwing a glance towards the chair that was thought unoccupied. Frantz was still there ; but his mouth seemed all awry ; the cards passed on and made the round of the table without stopping at the mysterious chair. Jack remarked this and drew his hand across his face, so as to make sure he was really awake. When his turn came again, he again won ; and then took another look at his opposite neighbour. Frantz now appeared to be bald. Each time Jack played, he observed some new change in the look of Frantz. Feeling more and more disquieted, he pretended to let a piece of money slip out of his fingers ; and by way of assuring himself of the presence of the stranger, took care to set it rolling towards him. The piece sped on, and he saw it go right across the seat occupied by Frantz, just as if it encountered no obstacle in its course ; but he caught no sound of its chinking on the floor, which was of inlaid wood, and searched for it there in vain. At this Jack turned pale, and trembled in every limb.

Meanwhile the play went on. Soon day began to dawn, the candles grew pale, and the guests rose to retire. The deal was in Jack's hands ; and he resolved to play one game for light stakes, and to play it fairly, with a sincere wish to lose. Already he had his magic pack in his pocket, and was about to begin with the true cards ; when all the players—having compared notes on his unheard-of run of luck—united together to vanquish him, and made up amongst themselves a stake of fifty thousand pounds, as a desperate means of recovering their losses. The sight of so much money, the notes, the gold heaped up before him, and the thought that he had in his possession the power to make them all his, bewildered his brain. His cupidity was aroused ; his bad passions came into play ; and availing himself of a moment when some discussion drew everybody's attention to the other side, he slipped his own pack of cards on the table, and put the others out of sight.

And now the game began. Jack dealt, alternately, one

card on his right and one on his left ; that on the left was for himself ; that on the right for his opponents. He drew them from the pack, one by one, turned them on their faces, and laid them down on either side. The appointed winning card was the Knave of Hearts. As he had his own pack of cards in his hand, he felt no uneasiness on the matter. But as the decisive card still kept back, he began to feel alarmed. He went on dealing ; but the card for which all were waiting would not show itself : the pack was almost dealt out. His heart beat fiercely ; his hand shook. By chance, he cast his eyes opposite. He saw there the two eyes of Frantz, like coals of fire, and stopped, chilled with terror.

"Go on!" impatiently exclaimed all the gamblers.

He kept on dealing, but with a shudder that made the cards shake in his hand, like the leaves upon a tree. All at once, the knave of hearts turned up on the heap of cards at his left. Jack hastened to put his hand down on it, and casting a glance around—

"I have won!" he said.

"Liar!" exclaimed a harsh shrill voice.

The colour mounted to his cheeks ; he looked about for the insolent fellow who dared thus to accuse him, but he only saw that all the players were pointing with their finger at the card in question. He looked at it, and turned pale.

It was the KING OF DIAMONDS !

At sight of this he was much disturbed ; a mist passed before his eyes, and it was only by a great effort he could save himself from fainting. An instinctive and involuntary feeling of curiosity compelled him to look towards Frantz, and he saw him, but clothed in the robes of the King of Diamonds.

The cards fell from his hands, a feverish tremor seized his whole body, and his hair seemed to him as if standing up from his head.

Meanwhile, the players, without mercy for his sufferings, and knowing nothing of the cause of his sudden terror, urged him to go on. They picked up the cards, and he drew them one by one, with a convulsive hand. At last

the Knave of Hearts turned up on his left, and no one disputed his having won. As for him, impressed as he still was with doubt and fear, he hesitated to believe he had really got the winning card. However, when all the others rose and left their stakes to him, then only his doubts ceased ; and gathering up his enormous winnings, he hastened to leave the place.

VI.

THE DREAM.

THAT evening had been fraught with painful emotions to Jack. He lay upon his bed, tossing with fever, and was a long time getting to sleep. At last a heavy slumber en-chained, rather than composed, his weary limbs ; but his soul, still a prey to its terrors, tasted no repose. He was scarcely asleep, when a strange dream came to torment him. He saw himself seated at a play-table, which he wanted to leave, and where he was playing in spite of himself. He won every time, but whenever he extended his arm to take up his winnings, the silver and gold melted in his hands and burned his fingers. Then he would wish to rise and retire, but an invincible force bound him to his seat. The last game, that which had so much agitated him, was acted over again before his eyes every instant, when, believing himself to see the knave of hearts, he cried out, "I win ;" the card would leap up in the air, and the figure of the King of Diamonds, detaching itself suddenly from it, rushed towards him. A vague consciousness of his condition made him aware he was sleeping ; yet, nevertheless, these visions affrighted him as much as if they had been real. His efforts to rouse himself and throw off his torpor were terrible ; but he ever felt a bony hand placed upon his shoulder, and nailing him to his chair. By-and-bye the candles seemed to go out, the faces of the players grew indistinct ; soon they resembled only shadows. Jack gazed upon them and tried to recognise them, when, all of a sudden, he perceived, seated in their places, the personages represented on the cards ; standing in the midst of whom, the King of Diamonds, with crown on head and sceptre in hand, seemed to be in command of his subjects.

All these great personages set themselves to play a game together, addressing one another by their names.

"Lancelot," said the Knave of Spades to the Knave of Clubs, "I stake my velvet cap and plume against the buckler you carry so awkwardly in your hand."

"Pallas," said the Queen of Clubs to the Queen of Spades, "I propose to play my collar of pearls against your crown of gold."

"Rogier," went on the Knave of Diamonds, "I will play you for the nose of Master Jack, that famous gambler, who is so clever at winning."

"And I for his ear," replied the King of Clubs.

"And I for his head," said the Knave of Spades.

"Silence, gentlemen!" said the King of Diamonds. "I cannot permit you to deal piecemeal with a man who is my property. I intend to keep him, all entire, for myself."

On a sudden, jumping up from their seats, they set to dancing round the table, and each of the players, as he passed near Jack, shouted in his ear—"Cheat!" Then they filed off, one by one, towards the door, and vanished, leaving Jack in profound darkness.

He was endeavouring to recover himself, and collect his senses, towards the middle of the night, just as a feeble light appeared to come down from above. He then saw before him, in the shade, a young man, who stood near him, and regarded him with a look of sadness. His countenance was pale and gentle, and his long fair hair fell upon his shoulders; his blue eyes shone with a pure light, and his brow was slightly contracted. The sight of this young man, restored calm to the soul of Jack, who felt himself attracted towards him by some secret sympathy.

"Who art thou?" said he; "thou, who regardest me with so much kindness."

The young man still kept his eyes fixed on him, but replied not. Jack rose up, and went towards the Unknown; but according as he approached him, so the vision receded.

"How is this?" said Jack. "Dost thou fear me? Give me thy hand, I believe it to be that of a friend."

The young man shook his head in token of refusal, and raised his beautiful blue eyes, full of tears, towards heaven.

"But, who art thou then?" repeated Jack, in a voice of entreaty.

Then the young man gazed at him for a long time, laid his hand upon his heart and said:

"Thy youth."

Then he vanished.

At that moment Jack awoke, and found himself bathed in a cold perspiration.

VII.

BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE LIP.

THE sun was already high in the heavens, when Jack arose. Its rays, piercing through the Venetian blinds, entered the chamber like arrows of fire, forming beams of light, in which danced, like swarms of shining insects, many a thousand grains of dust. Out of doors, the birds warbled in the trees, and the breeze sang among the trembling leaves. The bright colour of the lovely day, the smile of nature in her morning robe, restored calm once more to the gambler's bosom, and made him forget the painful visions of the night. He rose up cheerful, and almost happy. It was the last day he had to pass in that country; all the preparations for his departure were complete.

He had ordered an excellent breakfast; to which he set down with the complacent ease of a man proud of his wealth; the table was covered with a napkin of brilliant whiteness, laden with appetising dishes, vessels of chased silver, and cut glass, adorned with flowers delightful to look upon. Jack could not refrain from a moment's contemplation of such luxury, of which he was the object, and the fortunate possessor. Gently lolling back in his chair, his arms crossed, and a smile on his lips, he enjoyed the delight of these sumptuous luxuries, regardless of the source whence they were derived. Pouring out a glass of Bordeaux, and raising it to his eye, he gratified himself with watching the light sparkling in the clear amethyst-coloured liquid.

"Decidedly, life is a pleasant thing," said he, smiling on his glass.

At this moment, a clamour was heard from outside his ante-chamber.

"Go, see what it is about," said he to a servant, carelessly.

The man came back to say that a beggar would insist on stopping to rest himself in the doorway, and chant out his prayers, in spite of all the reiterated orders from the valets, and their urging him to go."

"I have already ordered that none of these wretches be allowed to approach me," said Jack, with severity. "Go, tell them to drive him away instantly."

The servants went out again; but soon the noise and shouting redoubled. Jack rose impatiently, to see his orders carried out. On reaching the vestibule, he saw at the door a poor man, who was struggling with his servants. At sight of their master, the lackeys released him; and the beggar, picking up his hat, that had fallen in the struggle, applied himself to imploring pity from Jack.

He humbly kissed the rich man's hand. A beard, all matted and neglected, concealed almost the whole of his visage; a grey blouse scarcely sufficed to cover his chest, which was shirtless; while his wretched pantaloons, a hundred times patched, fell over stockings, once fine and glossy, but at this moment, shapeless and torn, suffering his naked feet to be seen.

The sight of such wretchedness, which ought to have softened Jack, only served to anger him.

"My good gentleman," said the poor man, "have pity on an unfortunate man."

"Come, enough of this," broke in the master of the house; "I have nothing to give to fellows like you. I have no liking for beggars and idle persons; and, moreover, I never give alms."

The mendicant could scarcely repress a movement of indignation.

"Ah, you don't give alms," he said.

"No, I tell you," said Jack, growing more and more irritated, "and to you less than to any other."

At these words, the poor man raised his head, which he had hitherto held down, and stretched out his arm towards Jack, with an eye boldly fixed upon him.

"You ought to give something to *me*," he cried, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

Jack recoiled in horror. He recognised Sylvio, his friend; the friend he had ruined at play, and by cheating! He drew out his purse in haste, and threw it in the hat of the unfortunate man, turning away his head as he did so. He went back to table, sad and displeased with himself. But, so strong was selfishness within him, that the spectacle of his own luxury, and the idea of his own wealth, soon drove this scene from his memory.

"After all," said he, with harshness, "it is his own fault. Ruined! By Jove, I have been the same as he is; but, nevertheless, I found my way out of it. So much for those who do not know how to master their fortune. And now," added he, taking up his glass, that he had replenished, "come, sweet friend of gaiety, aid me to forget these annoyances."

He was about to carry it to his lips, when a fresh tumult resounded through the house.

"What, again?" said he, with impatience, "this is insufferable. But we will not go to it: it is better to get rid of such people in the regular way, and without noise. I have no desire to expose myself a second time to the disagreeableness of seeing Sylvio. Here," said he to a servant, as he gave him some pieces of money, which he took at random out of his pocket. "Give these to the beggar, for it is one, doubtless, and don't let me hear any more of him."

The servant had been gone out some minutes, but the noise still continued.

"What is it about, this time?" asked Jack, as he saw him return.

"Sir, it is a madman, for he rejects this money, and declares he will not budge until he has all your fortune."

"This is a little too strong," said Jack, in a rage. "Assemble all the servants; let them use force, and throw him into the street like a dog."

The domestics were going out to put their cruel orders into execution, just as the door opened, and a stranger, dressed in a very singular fashion, entered the room, without ceremony, as if he were in his own house. Jack, full



of rage, and just about to rise from his seat, cast his eyes upon him. He remained nailed to his chair.

It was the KING OF DIAMONDS!

The new comer motioned away the servant with an imperious gesture, and the man retired trembling: then he took his seat, quietly, opposite the master.

"Well, my fine player," said he, ironically, "you did not wait for me I see; but good company can never be unwelcome, especially as I am an old acquaintance. Here's

to your health," he added, taking up the glass, which Jack had just replenished. He drank it slowly, like one who is a judge, and tastes what he drinks.

"Capital!" said he, as he set the glass on the table. "'Pon my word, I could not have chosen better myself. Here is some pheasant, which sends forth a gentle odour of truffles, enough to waken the dead." And he helped himself to a wing of the bird, and devoured it with a visible relish.

Jack remained in his chair, without motion, pallid and dumb; he felt like one annihilated. His eyes fixed on that terrible scoffer, his head stiffened, his teeth closed; he looked like that guest of stone who sits at the banquet of the doomed.

His guest went on eating and drinking, apparently without noticing Jack's stupor. At every instant he congratulated him on his taste and luxury.

"Excellent," he repeated; "delicious! Really he was no fool I have been doing service to. I am pleased to see you have profited by my gifts. Here's a cream such as scarcely kings have at their tables; and this Rhine-wine is perfect—perfection, 'pon my honour! But pray do honour to these many exquisite dainties yourself. Make yourself easy, my friend; we are in our own house!"

Jack remained motionless.

"Come," went on the other; "say something, at any rate. Laugh! it is such a fine thing to live and to laugh!" And he laughed loudly and mockingly. "Go on living, my dear fellow, enjoy life; it is time for you to do so; *it is time*—do you understand me?"

Jack passed his hand over his forehead, and seemed to wake out of a dream.

"Well, then; what do you want of me now?" said he with boldness. "What do you wish, accursed that you are?"

"O what ingratitude!" cried the King of Diamonds. "Oblige these men, and this is the way they pay you for your kindnesses!"

"To the point! What is it you want?" Jack repeated.

"What do I want? That's a funny question. Have you, by chance, forgotten our game?"

"No. What then?"

"What then! I come to claim my winnings, and to tell you to get yourself ready."

"Get myself ready! But for what?"

"To quit this life, to be sure!"

At these words, Jack fell back in his chair and fainted.

"What an imprudence!" exclaimed the King of Diamonds, as he got up to rub Jack's temples with vinegar. "But, poor fellow, consider you have scarcely an hour to live, and there's no time for fainting. Come; a little courage and a little effort!"

Then he went on rubbing at Jack's forehead and temples, as if he would rub the skin off.

"Ah! here you are, come back again and in good time. I like men that live it out to the last . . . One hour, just! You know one can do a good many things in one hour! I have won twenty years in less time. You have there, before you, a capital breakfast; there are, doubtless, still in your cellar some bottles of fine old wine, for you seem to me to have furnished it well; let us have a jollification before we go. A little courage and we shall set off gaily; the voyage will not be a long one. But I have a great deal to do; you have an air of sadness, sad and dull as if you were going to your own funeral. Faith, take your own time, my friend; I have done all in my power to make you enjoy life to the end, you can have no fault to find with me."

Jack no longer heard him. His thoughts were far away from that splendid abode, those false pleasures, and that evil genius, who wished, even at the last, to lead him into wrong. They were in those sad families, where his wicked avarice had made so many victims. He thought what remorse, what faults, what maledictions he had amassed upon his conscience. The whole of his life repassed before his eyes. One by one, he saw those whom he had ruined. Here was Sylvio, covered with tatters, begging at his door and driven from it by himself. There was some mother of a family come to demand an account of the fortune of her husband, who had been robbed of it; further on, some young man, once pure, noble and generous, ruined by him

at play, fallen from misery to debauchery, and from debauchery to crime, displayed before his eyes the grievous spectacle of faded looks and wasted youth. Jack felt himself responsible for all these miseries; and these crimes fell with all their weight upon his conscience. His vices and his faults appeared before him in all their horror, surrounded by the train of misery, shame and disgust, which they drew after them. Never, in his worst days, had he experienced torture like this. Such was his remorse, such the shame he felt for himself, that at this moment he found his victims had less to plead against him than himself, and that he supplied their place. "See, then," said he "the fruits of these nights of sleeplessness, heaped in disorder! See what the wealth of twenty families, ruined by my perfidy, has brought me! The sorrow, the shame, and the remorse!"

Hereupon he fell back in his chair, and remained plunged in deep and doleful meditation. His countenance was pallid, his eyelids closed, his brows contracted, and his looks seemed covered with a cloud of sadness.

VIII.

THE CHEATER CHEATED.

DURING this time, the King of Diamonds walked up and down the drawing-room, examining every piece of furniture, and every object; and setting forth, as he did so, with cruel irony, their value and good taste.

All at once Jack rose up.

The King of Diamonds turned round and remarked with surprise the calmness of his countenance, his air of decision, and his firm and serious look.

"How much time have I left?" enquired Jack, in a firm voice.

The King of Diamonds pulled out his watch.

"Five-and-twenty minutes," he replied.

"I ask of you one quarter of an hour more; will you grant it to me?"

"So be it. I am of a kind disposition. And let us use it well, old comrade—this quarter of an hour of grace.

Let us make amends for the twenty years in that time. Wine ! pleasure ! play ! Ah ! play, above all. One last game, my noble player ; but, this time, with equal arms ; no perfidy, or bad faith ; no cheating cards. Come, let us make our adieu to life a merry one."

But Jack did not appear to hear him. He went to his desk, and after looking through some papers set himself down there to write. At times he stopped, as if looking for some account, or name ; and as soon as he found it, went on writing with a feverish eagerness. Once he remained for some time interrupted, the word he sought for not occurring to his memory.

"How!" he exclaimed, "I have forgotten his name ; the name of him to whom. . . ."

"You have ten minutes yet," said the King of Diamonds.

"Oh heavens!" cried Jack, "one last favour ! his name ! recall to me his name ! It is the last favor I ask. Give me his name, I implore."

"He remained yet a few instants more, absorbed in this painful meditation. Suddenly, a visible movement of satisfaction pervaded his countenance ; he had found the name he had so long searched for. He wrote it down in haste ; added a few more words to the writing ; then, advancing to the King of Diamonds, with a calmness that surprised this cruel scorner, "I am ready," said he.

"What is that paper that you have scrawled so much upon?"

"My will."

"A capital thought ! I hope you have not forgotten me."

"I have taken care of you."

"I came in good time. It is a pleasure to me to see that I have not been obliging an ungrateful fellow, as I feared. And what have you left me, old comrade?"

"This, of course," said Jack, handing him back the famous pack of cards.

"That is only a restitution, and not a legacy. What else?"

"What else? My curse ! You perceive ; as you say, that you have not had to do with an ingrate."

"Ha ! ha !" cried the King of Diamonds, with a laugh;



" I have already received so many legacies of that nature, that I can dispense with yours. Besides, it would be useless, and your charitable wish will produce no effect. For a long time past, curses have fallen on my head like the gentle rain which freshens without wetting. But let us have a look at this funereal document; it ought to be something curious."

Thus saying, he took the will from Jack's hands and began to examine it. As he went on reading, his brow contracted, and he let certain signs of visible annoyance escape him; his fingers clutched and crumbled the paper. On arriving at the close, he made a horrible grimace.

" Who are all these heirs," said he; " and what is this list of ridiculous names?"

" Those of the unfortunates whom I have ruined with the aid of your infernal talisman."

" What a piece of foolery!"

" At this moment that word no longer moves me; or, rather, I accept it as an eulogy."

" You talk nonsense."

" Yes, in your opinion. But enquire of these, my heirs, if they think as you do. As far as I am concerned, what matters it to whom I leave my wealth; since, henceforth, it must be useless to me."

The King of Diamonds reflected for an instant; then, putting on a serious air.

" Listen to me," said he; " this time I am not cheating you; for it is in spite of myself that I am speaking to you. The act you have done restores to you your lost twenty years. So, as you are about to live, you can quite understand that you will stand in need of your money. Cut off then from this list of heirs some few only of the names; to be sure, there will be just that number of years cut off your life; but, then, you will be able to pass the others in pleasure and abundance."

" What," exclaimed Jack, " do these legacies, which are only a restitution, avail to discharge my debt contracted with you?"

" I am sorry to say they do. A power greater than mine compels me to make this avowal."

"Ah! I may live again! I shall live again!" exclaimed Jack, in great joy. And he ran to his desk, to alter some words in what he had written.

"Good," said the King of Diamonds, "during this period I have not altogether lost him. You will rob me of one ten years," added he, as he watched Jack writing; "but I shall trap you again for the other ten."

Jack rose from his chair.

"This time," said he, holding out the paper, "you will not accuse me of ingratitude; for I thank you sincerely."

"What is this?" cried the King of Diamonds, as soon as he read the document, and saw the changes made by Jack. "A donation! a gift!"

"Doubtless. Since I am not obliged to die yet; as far as my will goes, I have provided for the twenty years; it is no very long period."

"Ah! you cling to life up to that point."

"It is so good to live! You said so to me yourself."

"Yes, with riches. But this deed is your ruin; and these twenty years will be twenty years of misery and opprobium for you."

"I am aware of it."

"And you persist."

"With joy."

"Triple fool!" exclaimed the King of Diamonds; "and, moreover, you laugh at such a prospect."

"It is so good to laugh! Those, again, are your own words. But, in your turn, you don't laugh now. What is the matter, my joyous companion? . . . Frankly you have now, as I had some time ago, an air of sadness. You look doleful and dull, as if you were going to my funeral; . . . or, rather, as if you were not going there. Come, confess you have had enough of laughing."

"No more of this child's play. Consider the matter seriously, while there is yet time. You can retrench ten names of the list, and ten years of your life; it will then be in your power to pass the other ten agreeably."

"My determination is inflexible."

"Wretch!" cried the King of Diamonds, in a furious rage, "you have cheated me!"

"To be sure I have ; and it was you who taught me to do it : you ought to be satisfied, and proud of your pupil, my noble master."

"Do you mock me, traitor?"

"Just as a short time since you scoffed at"

"Ah, this is too much," interrupted the King of Diamonds. And, crumpling up the paper, he threw it on the fire.

Jack rushed to the hearth ; and, thrusting his hand intrepidly into the flames, seized the precious document. His adversary, at this sight, leapt towards him ; and, seizing his arm with violence, compelled him to keep his hand for a short time among the burning coals. Vain effort! Jack, who knew that on this last struggle depended his safety, felt his courage and his strength redoubled; and, finally, getting the victory, he seized the paper with his left hand, while his right still remained plunged among the flames, and pressed it forcibly against his heart.

"Now," he cried, "accursed wretch, thou shalt not have it but with my life!"

Scarcely had he uttered these words, than a shrill hissing was heard, and a thick smoke filled the whole apartment. When it went off, THE KING OF DIAMONDS had disappeared.

IX.

THE EXPIATION.

SOME time afterwards, a man, still young, but with bald forehead, and looks meagre, and marked with signs of premature age, was seen wandering from the town to the country, with staff in hand and a wallet on his back.

You have rightly guessed — he was Jack.

There was nothing sad in the aspect of this man, lately so rich, so flattered, so envied ; beaten down as he now was, humiliated, begging a morsel of bread at doors, where yesterday he had been received as a welcome guest, and that were now shut against him. As for him, he passed on serene in the midst of insults, without returning them ; nor one thought of mollifying those who outraged him. The places he most frequented were precisely those where



he was most known, where he could reckon up most of his victims. His former servants insulted him, in revenge for the severity with which he had used them; and mothers pointed him out to their children, to inspire them with horror at the vices which had been his destruction. Sometimes he would enter one of the gambling-houses, where he used to be received as some grand lord, and displayed there the spectacle of his wretchedness; and endeavoured thus to rescue the unhappy victims, seized by that fatal passion that had degraded him. At such an apparition, a sensation of shame came over the players; the cards fell from their hands, and the play was interrupted. More than one young man, just ready to plunge into this life of unhealthy emotions, was seized with remorse at seeing him, and fled these fatal houses, never again to enter them.

For twenty years he led this sad life; and during those twenty years of wretchedness, disgrace, and outrage, no one heard a word of complaint escape his lips.

One day, he was sitting on the skirts of a wood, whither he sometimes repaired to repose himself.

It was on a beautiful evening in autumn. The sun, setting in the horizon, lighted up all the prospect with a gentle brightness. The yellow leaves were dropping silently from the trees. The insects of the night began to murmur softly round him, while the blackbirds warbled in the bushes, and the red-breasts came with their gentle and plaintive cry, to wet their little throats in a neighbouring pool. Jack was motionless, his brow contracted, his gaze vaguely fixed on the fields and the hill-sides, as they, by degrees, became wrapped in the shadows of evening.

"What a lovely night," said he, in a low voice; "how soothing is this pale light to the eyes, and how good is God to have provided for this last peaceable hour for reflection. My destiny is thus accomplished, my last day has arrived, everything tells me so. Jack, my poor friend, you must prepare to quit this life."

He took off his blouse, shook the dust from it, folded it up with care, and laid it on the grass. He set on one side his felt hat, and placed in it some pieces of money, that still remained to him.

"Some poor man will find all this," said he; "and perhaps will bless the memory of the Unknown, who has left him so miserable a legacy. Alas! how little it resembles what twenty-years ago . . . Away with such memories—the Jack of other days is dead."

He took from his wallet a morsel of bread, and broke it, and ate a portion; then gave the rest to the birds, who were flying around him.

"Eat my friends, my last friends," said he. "I owe you thus much at least, you who charm my last hours with your songs, and who will cover, with dead leaves, the corpse of a poor abandoned man!"

And he regarded, with a smile, the wrens and the tomtits, as they disputed for the crumbs that fell from so modest a feast, and busily searched for them even just under his hand.

"Can I thus still do good?" said he, as he heard the little cries of delight from his winged guests. "Alas!" he sadly added, "I can never do as much good as I have done harm."

His head fell upon his breast, and he seemed as in a dream.

Suddenly, the birds flew off, as if alarmed. Jack raised his eyes. A young man stood before him; it was the same handsome young man, with pure forehead, blue eyes, fair hair, and modest mien, just as he had appeared to him, long ago, in a dream. But this time, the youth seemed happy, and his lips half opened with a sweet smile.

"I recognise thee again," said Jack, to him, as he rose up; "Yes, thou art with me once more, pale phantom of my youth. I know what thou comest to announce to me. Wilt thou still refuse to press my hand, O thou who seemest so to love me!"

"No;" said the apparition, holding out its hand, "for now thou art worthy; thou hast expiated thy faults. Suffering, voluntarily accepted, and undergone without complaint, has purified thy soul. Thou art about to quit with me this place of sojourn, free and pardoned. Thine hour has come, Jack; art thou prepared?"

"For twenty years I have awaited thee."

"Follow me, then," said the young man, as he plunged into the shades of the forest.

They departed, and since that hour no one has heard mention of Jack the Heartless.

THE LITTLE RED MAN.

I.

FATHER ANTHONY.

ONCE upon a time there was a miser; stern, severe, and evil-disposed. Although old, and rich already beyond the possibility of want or the power of spending what he had got, he thought of nothing else but the amassing of money. His heart was so bad that he cared not for the ill-opinion that every one had of him; and though he had lost his wife—the few troubled years of whose existence he had rendered miserable—he showed neither shame nor sorrow at her early death. One only thing seemed to sadden him; one only care had shown that his heart was not quite as hard as the nether millstone; this was the death of his daughter, a pretty little merry dancing girl, ten years old; but after some time, even this affliction was altogether forgotten, and his every thought and his whole soul was swallowed up in one only thought, that of heaping up and hoarding wealth.

Now it happened, that in some old book of the middle ages (a time, my dears, when true learning was lost, and men sought study only for their own advantage, and not for the glory and advancement of their fellow creatures, as the truly learned do), this wicked old miser had read that some one had found out a means of making gold by treating together in a crucible certain substances, such as glass, copper, human bones, and the like. According to this book, the work was to be done in the night, and with certain mysterious words of power. Father Antony, who thought what a rich man he should be, if he could only make gold instead of having to earn it, gave himself perpetually to the exercise of magic; that false and impious

science which all worthy and sensible men denounce as wicked and useless. He spent his whole life in this pursuit, but got nothing. For all that he was not discouraged, and passed night after night in searching after the terrible secret, shut up in his cabinet, surrounded by all sorts of emblems of the magic aid.

Now, this search after gold was a very dangerous trade; for the men who carried it on were not then aware of what we now know, namely, that to dissolve some metals, gold especially, in acids, produces fulminating powder, which is a thousand times more dangerous than gunpowder; so, they used, without knowing it, to make this powder, or red gold as they called it, in their crucibles; and then it would blow up on a sudden, destroy everything, and kill the gold-seeker just at the very moment that he thought he had got hold of the gold itself, and with it "the great secret," as they used to call it.

One night, after our miser had been a long time blowing up his furnace-fire, he thought he saw a very extraordinary kind of bubbling up in his crucible—which is a long pot or pipkin, made of a kind of clay that will endure any degree of heat without cracking, splitting, or breaking—he blew away still more strongly, and the substance, in fusion, became agitated, and gave a strange crackling sound. Immediately, he recited some verses of sorcery, composed of words not understood by himself, and that no one else now understands; for they are supposed to be what is left and kept in mind by wicked men, from all times, of the old language that was spoken by the demons that used to rove about upon the earth in the early ages: then he leant over his crucible and peeped down into it, with an eager anxiety to make out what was going on. The bottom of the pot was one blaze of white, the molten metal boiled like water on a brasier, and out from it came sounds, which bore the semblance of inarticulate sounds, pronounced by a human voice. All on a sudden, the lamp, which he kept lighted, went out; a thick smoke rose from the crucible and ascended sluggishly towards the ceiling. Father Anthony watched this phenomenon with terror, while he saw that the cloud that had come out of the

crucible assume the shape of a body, and he soon had before his eyes "a man of smoke."

At sight of this, the miser recoiled almost in a fainting state.

"How's this," said the strange personage, "thou callest me; yet thou seekest to avoid me, when thou see'st me here?"

At these words, the miser, fancying himself on the point of finding out the secret he had so long been seeking for, went towards him.

"What dost thou want of me?" said the phantom.

"That you tell me the secret, how to make gold," said Father Anthony.

"That is not in my power," answered the mysterious man. "I am a Spirit of Fire; I cannot communicate any gift to you, but one in connection with the power of fire."

Father Anthony was greatly disappointed, and just on the point of telling him that he had no need of his services, when he thought better of it.

"In what does the power, you are enabled to confer on me, consist?"

"I can bring about that, at your mere wish, you can light up a flame; or you can excite or set on fire objects you designate."

The evil-minded miser thought in himself, to what purpose could he employ such a power; and after a brief reflection and a settlement of his plans, "Very well," said he; "give me this privilege."

"I consent," replied the Spirit; "but on one condition."

"Speak it."

"That you do not abuse this power."

At these words, Father Anthony who had none but bad designs in proffering such a request, hesitated an instant. But his evil instinct triumphed; and at the risk of losing his soul, he accepted the proposition.

"What object do you wish to make hot?" said the genius.

"That one," said Father Anthony, pointing to a chair.

The Phantom, upon this, made certain signs, and the chair rose up of itself, remained for an instant suspended

on the crucible, then came back to its place; all the while throwing somersaults, and cutting capers like a mountebank.

"Whoever shall sit down there," said the spirit, "shall not be able to rise from it without your permission, or until you have poured on his head one drop of this water."

And at these words a metal bottle came from the bottom of the crucible.

Finally, the Spirit touched the head of the miser with a burning finger, and vanished as he said,

"Remember thou our conditions; if not, thou wilt be mine."

These words set Father Anthony shaking in his shoes; for they grated sorely against his wicked conscience, which told him he was only going to make a criminal use of the gift he had just received. But in thinking of what treasures he might amass by this means, he soon forgot his own terror and the Spirit of Fire's menace.

II.

THE BURNING CHAIR.

FATHER ANTHONY was now desirous of trying the new power he had received. There was a bargain to come off next morning between him and a landholder in the neighbourhood. He wanted to buy a fine field, and pay as small a price as possible for it. The landlord came to call upon him.

"Pray be seated," said Father Anthony, slyly pointing out to him the magic chair.

The landholder sat down, and began discussing the price of the field. At first the heat of the chair was hardly perceptible, but it went on increasing, and the man became desirous to get up, but was greatly surprised at finding himself nailed, as it were, to his seat. He said nothing to Father Anthony, but went on with the bargain. The latter perceiving the charm in operation, feigned not to see it, and offered half of the price demanded, declaring he would not give a halfpenny more. The vendor, unwilling to let his field go at a price so very much under its value, tried again to rise up by way of closing the discussion, but

found the same difficulty in this manœuvre as on previous occasions. Astonished, and, at the same time, ashamed of his position, he regarded Father Anthony with an unquiet gaze, while the latter stirred his fire without seeming to be thinking of anything. Meanwhile the heat increased rapidly, and soon the poor landholder, unable any longer to stop where he was, gave a loud cry of pain, and made a new effort to rise from his seat; but he remained immovably glued to the chair, like a bird caught on a lime-twig.

"What is this?" exclaimed he, at last. "What is the matter with the chair?"

"Let us see," said Father Anthony, without replying to the question; "will you take the two hundred guineas I offer you?"

"No; I tell you!" replied the other moving in his chair. "I want four hundred. But what is the meaning of this? I am broiling!"

"Very well, let us say no more about it," replied Father Anthony, all the while pretending not to see anything.

"But I am burning!" cried the landholder all at once.

"Come to the point, then; I offer you my two hundred guineas."

"Time enough for that," replied the other. "I am just as if I was sitting on burning coals."

"Don't tease yourself so;" replied Father Anthony. "Take my offer and there's an end of the matter."

"But I tell you I am broiling—I am stuck to this chair. I am suffering horribly!"

"You are joking, my good Sir. Come to the point, and let us close the bargain."

"I tell you again, I am roasting—that I can't raise myself! There is some sorcery in this."

"Once more yet, accept my offer and you will not burn in this way."

The unhappy man at last understood, that he was entirely in the power of his adversary; he would, however, still resist for a few moments.

"I will let you have the field for three hundred and fifty guineas," said he; "only let me out from here."

"Two hundred," replied the rascally old fellow, looking as cool as possible.

"Well then, for three hundred," replied the other.

"Two hundred."

"Oh! don't be such a thief, and let me go!"

"Whenever you wish, Sir. Two hundred guineas."

"No; I will never consent under any circumstances!"

"Take your own time, Sir;" replied Father Anthony, with great coolness. "If you like your present position, pray keep in it; for my own part, I can wait as long as needs be. Pray don't hurry yourself."

The patient endeavoured still to bear the pain, and implore his executioner; but this proved useless, and his sufferings grew so sharp, that he was obliged to follow Father Anthony's lead, and agree to let him have the field for two hundred guineas. Upon which, Father Anthony took out the little flagon given him by the Spirit of Fire, dropped a few drops on the head of his victim, and the charm was broken.

III.

THE FIERY LOGS.

It is only fair to confess, that covetous as was Father Anthony, he felt some remorse at the dishonest trick he had played on his neighbour. But this was soon forgotten in his passion after money. He began again with a few scruples, but these scruples one after the other disappeared; and he ended by regarding as quite simple and innocent, what was in reality a criminal action, so that his passion was satisfied, and it still grew more greedy as it was fed. Herein lies one of the greatest dangers and most terrible of the punishments that fall on evil courses; once that the first step has been taken, the foot is pushed on by degrees; there is no stopping point, and one must go forward and farther in crime.

That is just what happened to this unhappy wretch. His nearest neighbour was a dealer in wood, whose store-yard was only separated from his dwelling-house by a palisade court-yard. Now Father Anthony, who was a great sharper and mean in his thieving, took it into his head, that as wood was dear, he ought to find some means

of warming himself for nothing ; so he filched away the logs from the store-yard of his neighbour. This latter perceiving, at last, some sensible diminution in a pile of wood that had not yet been touched, and suspecting his covetous neighbour to be the thief, had recourse, by way of convincing himself, to the following trick.. He selected out of the heap in question two or three tempting logs, and hollowed them out ; then filled the hollows with gunpowder, and closed up the hole so cleverly as to conceal every trace, taking care, however, to do this in such a manner that the explosion should be only enough to frighten, and not so strong as to injure.

One chilly evening, when he saw his neighbour's lights out, Father Anthony, reflecting that it was very cold, and that he had to sit up all night at his goldmaking experiments, came out shivering into his back yard, and just took away three fine logs from the wood-dealer's pile. He threw them into his furnace fire, and as the wood was tolerably dry, the logs caught the flame, and in a few moments threw out a glare, it was right pleasant to see. Father Anthony, sitting opposite this capital fire, rubbed his hands gaily, as he thought how nice and warm he was, and at so very trifling an expense.

"That is a capital fellow, that neighbour of mine!" said he, with a chuckle. "His wood is excellent, and—he does not charge me too much for it. It is really a pleasure to have such kind neighbours!"

He had hardly finished, when three successive cracks or explosions were heard on the hearth, and the coals leaped up like mad things on all sides, not a few of them falling on Father Anthony's own head. Up jumped the scared old man ; and we don't like to mention the name of the person whom he thought he just then heard knocking at the door. Derisive sounds of mockery seemed to resound through the air like demon voices ; and it was a long while before he came to himself, and recognised the laughter as proceeding from his neighbour, a circumstance which at once cleared up the mystery of the explosion, and clearly marked him out as the author of the trick. Furious at seeing himself thus detected and laughed at, he vowed to be revenged.

" You mock me?" said he; " so be it: But this railly shall cost you dear."

IV.

INCENDIARISM.

It is a very sad thing, and very dangerous withal, to possess the power of doing injury to any one. A temptation to use such a power is sure to come even to the best of us; and there are too often, alas! those, who are not able to withstand such an opportunity. Full of desire for revenge, Father Anthony resolved to avail himself of the deadly gift that had been conferred on him of setting light to any object at his will. The Wood-dealer was an honourable man, as he knew, and well he knew, also, that his wood-yard and his house, constituted the good man's only worldly wealth. His daughter, little Maria, a pretty child of ten or twelve years of age, was the most charming, the gentlest, and the best of children of her age. Father Anthony himself, for his heart had not yet been quite closed to every good feeling, was particularly fond of Maria, because she recalled to his memory the child he had lost. Well! well! nothing of all these availed to check him in his unjust and wicked vengeance.

Three days after the logs had made such a noise on his hearth, he went to his window, and fixed a stern gaze, on the wood piled up in the court-yard of his neighbour, with the intention of setting it all in flames.

It was evening, the wood-merchant had retired within his dwelling, and sought relaxation from the business of the day in chatting with his wife, and playing with his dear little Maria, whom he was jumping on his knees. " How happy am I," thought he, as he embraced his little girl; " how blessed in having a wife so good, and a child so pretty."

During this time, his wife, who was at work, would lift up her eyes from it to her husband and daughter, and she was happy. But as soon as Maria met her kind and loving gaze, she got down off her father's knees and ran to her mother, to kiss and caress her. " Look at the naughty little puss," said her father, with a smile, " how glad she is to leave me."

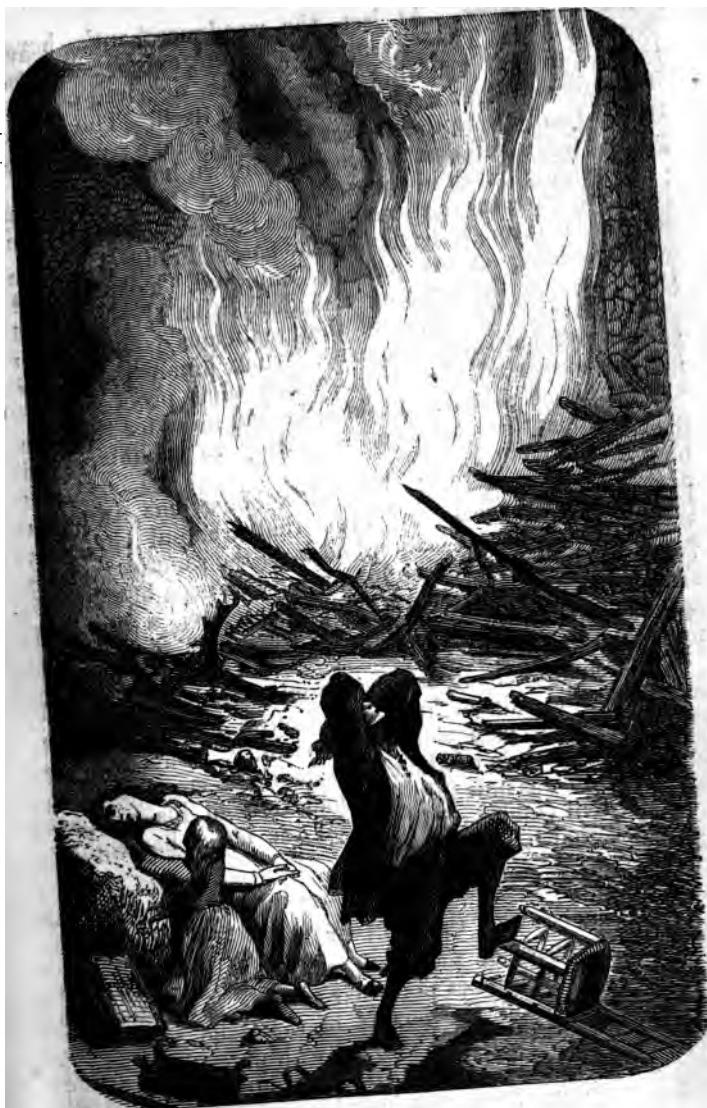
"No, no, papa," Maria answered, "you can't say leave you, as long as I am by the side of mamma, whom you love so much."

Then both father and mother pinched the child's ~~rosy~~ cheeks with their foreheads, almost touching each other over its dear head.

Suddenly an ominous noise resounded from outside, and snatched them from their happiness. "Fire! Fire!" was the cry — and quite close to them. At the same moment, came loud, quick, hard knocks at their door, and before it was quite opened, a man entered with a disturbed and agitated air, "Hasten!" before they had time to address a word to him; "your wood-store is on fire; your house is in danger — come out quickly."

The father stood motionless at this news. In one moment, he saw himself ruined by this fire, and he could not believe it possible. Soon, however, a feeling of the danger his wife and daughter were running, aroused him from his stupor. He snatched up Maria in his arms, seized his wife by the hand, and went out in headlong hurry, desperate, into the night.

A horrible spectacle met his gaze. All his store-wood was on fire. The flames mounted up the heaps of logs, and raging, shot up their sharp fiery tongues into the air. Fed and nourished by the wood, abundant and dry, they greedily devoured it, licking it all round, and crackled and rejoiced in their prey. They grew stronger and stronger every instant, fiercer in their hot triumph, until at last they obtained entire mad mastery; and, then, the court-yard, which was the theatre of the incendiary's operations, presented the spectacle of one vast furnace of fire. The sparkling from the wood, the crash of the beams, thrown down and rolling over, the furious roaring of the raging, angry, flames mingled all these terrors in that dismal sight. A crowd, perpetually increasing, from all sides, massed itself in front of the house, and watched, with horror, the progress of the fire. To add to the misfortune, it was not possible to think of extinguishing the fire; it was too violent, and found too much material to devour. All that could be done, was an endeavour to



limit its ravages. At last, the wood-merchant's house began to burn. They saved all they could, and speedily set to work to pull it down, so that the fire, deprived of what it fed upon, might not further extend itself. The unfortunate family were themselves obliged to take part in this pulling down and destruction of their own home.

In coming out of his house for the last time, and whilst hurriedly carrying out some articles he wished to save, the father saw, through the flames, the face of Father Anthony, who, standing at his window, unmoved, looked down tranquilly on the burning and demolition of his neighbour's house. The sight of that malicious countenance, almost joyful at such a moment, struck him with horror; and he suspected the truth. But what proof had he against his neighbour. Besides, he had no other thought, at the time than to save, as quickly as possible, some relics of his fortune.

All, alas! was lost! The store-house, his dwelling, had been destroyed, and even that tranquil chamber, which but an instant before, had been the sanctuary of his family's happiness, had no longer an existence but among ashes, rubbish, burnt and smoking stones; a shocking spectacle, that touched even the heart of the wicked man, who had been its cause.

The wood-merchant, fallen into misery, hired two small rooms, by the side of Father Anthony's house; and the latter saw with pain this closer vicinity. But this was nothing by the side of the chastisement in store for him. The measure was now full. He had violated his compact with the Evil Genius of Fire; and the latter had rightly calculated that it would be so.

V.

THE KINGDOM OF FIRE.

In the very centre of the earth, among those mysterious regions, where volcanoes find their sources, is an immense cavern, shut within the bowels of the globe. Its walls, hewn from the living rock, are set with precious stones of every kind, emeralds, topazes, rubies, etc. The vaulted dome is of rock crystal, of admirable transparency. It is

supported on columns of diamonds in the rough ; at the feet of which rise up flames, encircling them like transparent and brilliant curtains. The floor is sprinkled with little tongues of fire, always vacillating, so as to make them resemble a garden enamelled with flowers agitated by the wind. In the centre, stands a brazier wherein are burning certain unknown substances, which, without producing flames or even consuming, throw out a brightness and a warmth of which the most ardent furnaces can convey no idea. It is like a subterranean sun.

These diamonds, these flames, and these fires, reflected by the crystal vault, and reproduced in every sense by the precious stones on the walls, fill the cavern with a dazzling light, such as no mortal eye could endure. Here is heard, incessantly, a dull deep harmony, like to the muttering of far-off-thunder. The heat here reigning, is such as would melt metals however hard ; iron or gold would be consumed by it in less than a second. It is the Kingdom of Fire !

Just at this moment, a party of the Genii of the cavern were assembled around the brasier. All their bodies were resplendent and glittering ; burning carbuncles formed their eyes ; millions of flashing lights sparkled above their heads, and formed their hair. They wore, as garments, metals made ruddy in the fire and supple ; at the same time, giving each of them the air of some knight in iron armour, who had been thrown into a furnace. These are the good genii of fire ; those who preserve the heat of the stove, who take care of the poor man's hearth, who warm the oven where the bread is baking, and the furnaces where useful tools are made. Beside these, might be seen young girls of a dazzling beauty. These were clothed in robes made of blue flowers, the gentle pale light from which was reflected on their countenances ; their heads were crowned with a glory of bright fire, and their long hair resembled those tracks of light that rockets leave behind them. Their mission is to feed, in the evening, the hearth round which the poor women of a village assemble in winter to work, and tell over their legendary tales ; to them, also, is entrusted the keeping in of the lamp by which the young daughter watches by her sick mother's bedside. They

dwell in the flame of the candle on the table of the workman, whom they aid and encourage by the gentle brightness of a friendly light, and the charm of an enchanting silence.

Intermixed with these Good Genii, may be seen dwarfs, meagre and nimble, clothed in red, green, or blue, or all these colours at the same time. Their little faces are always smiling, and their eyes sparkle with wit and mischief. They wear on their heads a tall foolscap, on which shines an aigrette of sparks. Little, lithe, and blithesome, they are always in motion, jump about from right to left unceasingly, chatter among themselves like sparrows at sunrise, and play off a hundred little tricks against the Good Genii, which the latter take in good part, heartily laughing at and enjoying them. These are the Sprites of Fire.

Suddenly their movements ceased. A subterranean noise reached their ears; and the brasier, which occupied the centre of the cave, began to shake. Quickly there shot up from it a flame of unknown fire, the glare of which forced all the genii to cover their eyes. Then a complete darkness succeeded to this light. All present bowed down with respect; and a loud voice was heard to cry, "The King! the King!"

Instantly the cavern was filled with a flame of dazzling light; and above the brasier, there appeared a person of tall stature: this was the king of the cavern. His body was composed of diamonds in a state of fusion; and his head was so bright-shining, as to be like a sun placed on his shoulders; the rays issuing from it formed his hair. The only garment he wore was a sparkling flame, that floated about him like the undulating folds of a cloak, and gave forth an odour of myrrh and incense.

Erect upon a cloud of fire, the King stretched forth his hand; and all his subjects listened.

"Genii of Fire!" he said, "I am content with your services. But some one of my subjects has communicated to a man a power which he has abused. It is time to stop his career of crime, and to punish him. It is not, however, to you that I address myself; for you have no

knowledge but of what is good. Dark Spirits of the Cavern," added he, in a loud voice; "Come ye; behold your prey!"

Suddenly, from an obscure corner whither the light could not penetrate, there was heard to issue a growling sound, hoarse and terrible as the groaning of the winds from the depths of great forests; at the same moment forth came the evil Genii of Fire. They were of gigantic size. Their bodies, of a sombre red, resembled metal, reddened in the fire, and half-cooled; a blazing furnace placed in the middle of their forehead, served them for eyes, and they held in their hands something like a horn of abundance, from which—as if from some unfailing spring of fire—issued burning coals, whirling flames and molten metal. These are the Fire-demons, who blow up the fire where murderous arms are forged, and who, in days gone by, fired the piles on which criminals were burnt. Whenever they can escape from their caverns, they spread themselves over the earth, brandishing their torches; and all along their tracks may be seen forests in flames, and towns devoured by fires. Volcanoes are their ordinary dwellings, from out of which, their hot breath vomits forth torrents of lava and sulphurous smoke, that cover all the country round.

"Dark Genii," said their King, when he saw them assembled; "terrible executors of my decrees, I deliver over to you an insensate and criminal mortal who has abused our gifts. Let him die in your grasp, and with him die the secret entrusted to him."

"My Lord," replied one of the giants, "give to us some towns to consume; some people to destroy; some forests to devour; but do not degrade us to so base a task as that of punishing so poor a wretch. Such a victim is unworthy of us. There are others of your subjects, who will feel no compunction at charging themselves with a task like this!"

Then, at a signal from the King of assent to their wish, they retired within their cave; the tramp of their iron feet upon the sounding pavement, and the deep groaning of their burning breath being heard for a long time after their departure.

"Well, then, it is to you I hand over this victim ;" said the Spirit, addressing himself to the Sprites of Fire.

Whereupon, the little imps leapt with joy, and set to dancing a grotesque saraband, all the while uttering sharp ringing laughs. So brisk and lively were they, as to leap upon the little tongues of flame without bending them. At last one, a little fellow entirely dressed in red, separated himself from the rest, and disappeared across the crystal vault.

VI.

THE LITTLE RED MAN.

ONE day, Father Anthony was seated before his fire, poking at the blazing faggots, until they threw out thousands of sparks, when a little man, about as big as your fist, jumped out from the middle of the burning coals, and lighted upon his nose, where he hooked on with all his strength. Father Anthony uttered a cry of astonishment and pain, and raised his hand quickly to his face, to snatch off this unknown animal, but he only caught hold of the end of his own nose, for the Little Red Man was already on his right cheek. Father Anthony, in a rage, angrily put up his hand again, on this side; but the little red man again got out of the way of his hand, and jumped cleverly on to his left cheek, while Father Anthony was giving himself a sound box on the right. The unfortunate man again attempted to seize his enemy there; but he had already got a-top of the old man's head, and Father Anthony felt the little monster's claws, as he pattered about over his cranium, stirred about his hair, and struck his claws into the skin. Whereupon, furious and desperate, he followed up with his hand the monster, who always got out of his way, and always, by way of reply for his intended civility, stuck a claw deeply in the old man's flesh. Father Anthony rose up and ran round the chamber, uttering cries of pain. At the noise, his servant ran in; but as soon as the little red man saw him, he jumped into the fire and vanished. But the thousand little scratches he had made were so painful, that Father Anthony thought he still felt him on his head.

"Take him away! Take him off!" he exclaimed to his servant, continuing to cry out and pass his hand over his head.

"What is the matter?" said his servant.

"What is the matter! You fool, do you ask this? But this cat, this tiger, this monster, who is scratching off my head. Make haste, or I shall die!"

The servant looked at his master's head, and saw nothing there but the strange disorder of his hair.

"Make haste, scoundrel!" repeated Father Anthony.

"But, Sir, there is no person on your head."

"No one on my head, wretch! But I felt him; he stuck his claws into my skull—he has murdered me. Here, then, he is on my cheek; no, on my nose; no—he is everywhere, everywhere! Take him off, quick!"

And Father Anthony ran up and down the room, crying and shaking himself like a fish in a pan, when they fry it while yet alive.

"Alas," said the servant to himself; "my poor master has gone mad. What a misfortune! What is to be done? I can only think of one thing, and that is to cool his head."

He went out, and came back quickly with a pail of water, the whole of which he flung at once over the head of Father Anthony.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed that individual; "what are you about, you rascal?"

Soon, however, the coolness of the water appeased the burning sensation of the scratches, and he became a little more collected.

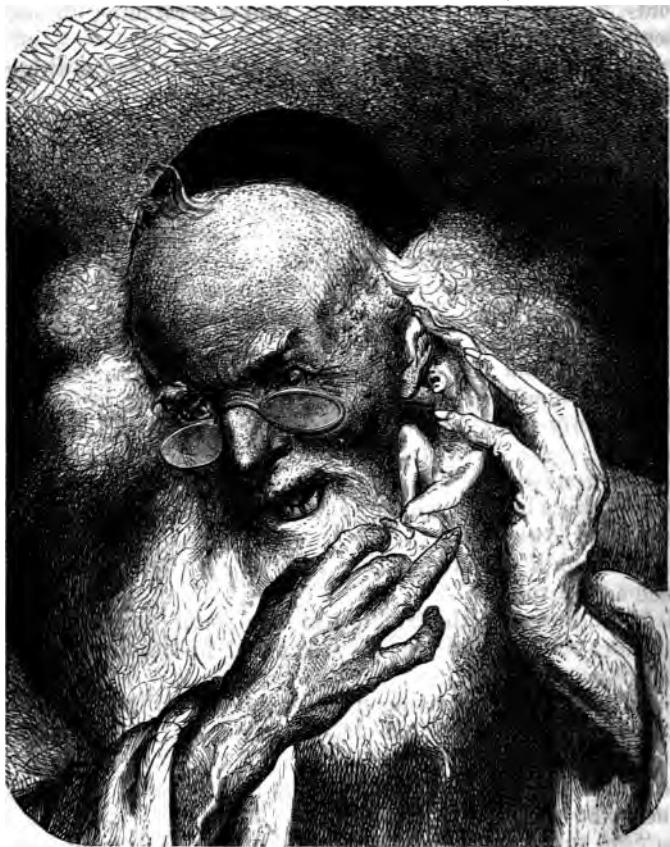
"Right," said he, as soon as he no longer felt the impression of his nails. "He has taken himself off, the little monster."

"Yes," replied the servant; "it appears that he is not partial to water."

"No more am I," said Father Anthony, shivering with cold, and dripping just like a spaniel fresh out of a river.

From this moment, Father Anthony knew no repose; his punishment had just commenced, and would last a long time. The Little Red Man was no other than the Demon of

Fire commissioned to chastise him. Irritated with his victim, this hobgoblin tormented him without ceasing, and in every possible manner. Sometimes he would break his spectacles on his nose; at other times, he would tear his



clothes; occasionally he would break his glass just as the unfortunate man was raising it to his lips. Once Father Anthony lighted his lamp to read a letter of great import-

e recently received. Just as he opened it and spread out before him to read, the lamp went out. He ghted it, and it again went out. He dashed it to pieces his rage, and lighted a scrap of paper; the paper threw a feeble light, by which he was enabled to read these ds; "I have to inform you, that one of your debtors . . ." n it went out also. Father Anthony could not read the er until the next morning, when he saw that it was to ise him to come that very instant, if he wished to save n a failure a large sum of money that was acing to him. The whole sum, by that time, was quite . Another time, he had taken up a roll of bank-notes, was about to count them, when the notes caught fire themselves. He let them fall, then caught them up in, and squeezed them in his hands to stifle the flames, burned his fingers, besides having the anguish of his cash all go off in smoke.

uch bits of ill-luck set him reflecting. He began too to repent of his selfishness. But he did not amend always. One evening, while thinking of all this, the ed man, in place of meditating how to expiate his t, was calculating the sums which his deadly talisman t bring him in. The chair was there, near the fire; he gazed on it with a visible pleasure. "With this," he, "I can repair all my losses. That retired old ent, who comes sometimes to see me, has a hand- amount in cash; that ought to come into my hands. is in delicate health, and will not stand very much ng. I will ask him to dinner. He will come, not ecting anything. I will shew him to a seat—the . 'Sit down, my dear sir'—and he will sit down ently—and then——"

He had not time to go on with his picture; the Little Man came to him, and leapt on to his face, with so h violence, that he fell back, and tumbled into the ning chair. Then his enemy went back with a bound the grate. Father Anthony was scarcely in his seat, n he felt a lively sensation of warmth, that rapidly eased. Although he knew the secret, he made a nt effort to raise himself. But this was in vain; for

he felt himself chained down by the charm. Next, he set to shouting with all his strength. His servant ran in; Father Anthony, out of his senses, and troubled at the pain, thinking only of water, cried out, "Water! water!"



So the servant thought his master had another attack of the same fever, from which he had formerly relieved him, and hastened to fetch another pail of water, which he threw over his head. This time, however, the remedy was of no avail. The heat kept still increasing, and Father

Anthony bellowed like a bull. The servant, naturally supposing that the one pail of water was not enough, brought a second; then a third; then a fourth, and threw them all over his master's head, who made a rare appearance in such a pickle. The miserable creature was undergoing his punishment; frozen on one side by the water so abundantly rained upon him, scorched on the other by the heat which still went on increasing, he would have died of anguish in the chair, if he had not found presence of mind enough to say, "The flagon, there, in the drawers!" and held out the key to his servant, who understood him, emptied the whole bottle on his head, and set him at liberty.

VII.

THE LAMP.

In a poorly furnished room, at night, a little girl, of from ten to twelve years of age, was seated at her work, by the side of a bed, on which was sleeping, in broken and fitful slumbers, a woman, whose features bore the traces of suffering and want. A solitary lamp threw its light over this dismal nook, casting over the sick woman a shadow that gave her the appearance of death. It was late; all the world had retired to rest; the silence was not stirred, but from outside, by the rare footsteps of belated passengers, in haste to regain their homes; and from the inside, only by the painful breathing of the sick woman, and the ticking of an old clock, the copper pendulum of which went and came and went continually. The pleasant chirping of the cricket, that friend of humble hearths, was heard but seldom, for there was no fire in the room, yet it was in the depth of winter. It makes one cold even to think of it.

Ah, how sad was this, my dear children!

But yet how beautiful! That young girl, that child, at an age when all other children have no care but how to amuse themselves, was working for the support of her sick mother. This girl was Maria. Her father had been absent a long time on affairs of business, and Maria was, at this moment, the only support of the house. With what ardour, too, she worked! It was already very late;

the cold became still more bitter ; her little fingers were all red with it. At times, weary and frozen, she would let her work fall from her hands and weep ; but quickly casting a look upon her mother, she would at once dry her tears and take courage to go on again. And still, when broken with fatigue and sleepiness, she would let her head fall down in sleep, her lamp, the sole friend that watched with her, would throw out a ray brighter than usual, and wake her with its gentle cracklings. "Thanks," would she say, "thanks, you recall me to my duty"; and then go on with her labours. Meanwhile, her drowsiness grew stronger ; but each time that she fell off to sleep, the lamp would begin again, and keep on awakening her.

"This is strange," said the little girl to herself; "one would say this lamp knew what I have to do."

One time, when she was just roused from her slumber in the same manner, she heard a little voice say gently to her, "Courage, my child !" Maria turned round, but saw no one, and thought she must have been deceived. She applied herself again to her work. "Courage, courage!" repeated the same voice.

"Ah ! this time I am not deceiving myself," said Maria. But she looked round the room in vain ; no one was there. She began to feel alarmed.

"Be not afraid, my child," said the same voice.

"Who is it speaks ?" said the terrified child.

"A friend," replied the voice.

"Whence are you, then ?" said Maria, rising from her chair, in a state of great uneasiness.

"Here," replied the voice, just close to her ear.

Then the flame of the lamp quivered and shook, after an extraordinary fashion, as if it wished to escape from the globe.

"Oh, how I wish you could see me," went on the voice, "for an instant, for a minute !"

At this moment, the hammer of the village clock raised itself with a dull noise, and began to sound the hour of midnight. Scarcely had it struck the last stroke, when the burning wick of the lamp leapt up like a column of fire, the room was filled with a soft light ; and Maria saw, with

astonishment, a beautiful and radiant young girl, whose dress and body were perfectly transparent, and who regarded her with a kind look, step forth out of the flame.



"At last the hour has arrived," said the apparition; "I can allow you to see me, and to console you. Maria, my child, you are under the protection of the Genii of Fire. We love you for your goodness of heart. Our King has sent me to encourage you, and to cure your mother. Sleep, my child, you have worked long enough."

Whereupon she extended over the couch of the sick woman a long veil of flame, and the visage of the poor woman, pallid and weary but an instant before, resumed the calmness and the hues of health. Then turning towards Maria, with a gentle smile.

"Adieu," she said; "courage and hope for good." Then she vanished in the flame, which went out at the moment.

Maria was motionless with astonishment, scarcely believing her eyes; but reassured by the words, and the benevolent air of the young girl, while she heard plaintive cries from the side where stood the house of Father Anthony. The small apartment in which Maria slept, was only separated from the room of her wicked neighbour by a slender partition. The young girl went in here to lie down, without seeking to hear what was going on near her. But she could not help lending an ear, when she heard the voice of Father Anthony in supplication, as he said, "Release me from this teasing, I implore you; let me not die by this slow fire. What must I do to be finally released from these torments every day? What must I do? Tell me, and I will do it."

"No," replied a sharp and piercing voice; "I like better to torment you; it is so amusing."

"Amusing," interrupted Father Anthony; "how can you find any amusement in making a wretched man suffer. Have you, then, no heart, you little monster? Are you, indeed, an imp of hell?"

Maria heard, upon this, a bitter and mocking laugh, which replied to these compliments; then the voice went on again, imitating the plaintive tones of Father Anthony.

"Amusing! How is it possible to find anything amusing in making the unfortunate suffer by burning them by a slow fire in a chair? Have you no heart, you old miser?"

And the same screeching laugh pierced the air, and Maria heard a number of little jumps and leaps, and a pattering of feet on the floor, just as if five hundred rats were dancing about. Father Anthony began again to yell for mercy in a most lamentable fashion.

"See, now," said the party talking with him, "I am not so ill-disposed as I seem to be, and by no means so bad as you. I am quite ready to show you a means of setting yourself free. Listen to me, then. In the depth of the forest there is an immense rock, called the *Demons'-Rock*. It is thither that you must go. You will find at the bottom of this rock, a hole just sufficiently large for a man to creep into like a weasel. It is a long winding

passage, which you have to follow, stooping till you arrive in a vast cavern, in the middle of which is an abyss, filled with perpetually raging flames. Once on the brink of this abyss, gather yourself up, shut your eyes, and leap down."

"Oh, oh!" cried Father Anthony, as if feeling already the pain from the flames.

"Ah, you will not be quite as comfortable as in a feather-bed," went on the other. "Nevertheless, you will not die; and, besides, you will only suffer for an instant, just about the time it takes to grill a mutton chop."

"But it is the punishment of condemned souls you are proposing to me."

"No doubt of it! And it is to save you from an everlasting burning, that I accommodate you with the opportunity of being roasted for a few minutes."

"No: I had a thousand times rather not. I won't do it."

"So much the better;" went on the little voice, with a laugh.

And the tumult recommenced. There were boundings and reboundings, leaps and jumps and somersaults, chairs turned over, and distracting cries from Father Anthony, as he ran across the chamber, as if flying from an enemy from whom he could not get away.

"Oh, I yield!" he cried at last. "I can bear no more."

"Very well;" replied the one who was talking to and tormenting him. "See what a good fellow I am. I am now about to point out to you another way. You can be ransomed by a voluntary victim — some one who will devote himself for you. You can reckon up lots of friends, thanks to your generosity, and they would like nothing better than suffering a little for you. But I give you notice, and you must give them notice also, on your own part, that whoever shall consent to devote himself for you, will experience torments in proportion with their faults. If he be criminal, he will suffer the greater pain; if, on the contrary—"

Here Maria heard, on her own side, a groan, that gave her notice of her mother's waking. She hastened to attend to her, and was unable to hear the rest of this singular conversation.

VIII.

A FINE DEVOTION.

You will readily understand, that the interview just described, had taken place between Father Anthony and the Little Red Man.

Now, the former was in a terrible anxiety, as he thought over the means of deliverance pointed out to him by his tormentor. He dreaded the tortures that had been set before his gaze. On the other side, he searched his mind in vain for the friends of whom the Little Red Man had spoken so mockingly, and as a derisive punishment for his wickedness. He was quite sure that he had not one. What was to be done? He fancied that, by means of money, he might purchase the devotion of some one. But to part with his money! what greater punishment could befall him than that? Thus this gold, for the possession of which he had committed so many crimes, must be given to ransom him from those crimes themselves. To what end, then, would have served all his cleverness, all his tricks, all his evil-doing? Only to bring upon him the hatred of man and the punishment of heaven.

At last he thought of his servant, who had been a long time in his service, and the only one who could put up with his harshness and his avarice. He rang the bell!

"James," said he, when the servant came in; "you have always been a good servant to me, thoroughly faithful and devoted."

"Yes, Sir;" answered James, who, badly clothed and worse fed, was in the habit of tearing his master's clothes that he might have them given him, as well as of stealing his wine.

"I am satisfied with you, my friend."

"What next," said the astonished James to himself, "master has never before called me his friend."

"I am not ungrateful," went on Father Anthony; "I wish to recognise your services. You have a bad waistcoat on, my boy; I will give you a new suit from head to foot."

"Oh, how good master is!" said James.

"For which purpose," continued Father Anthony, "you will take from my wardrobe my maroon-coloured cloth coat and my nut-brown trousers, that I have not worn these four years." James, who had hoped for something better, made a grimace.

"And, then," said his master, "it will be as well if you go and enjoy yourself a little. There's a sixpence to pay the expenses. Lastly, as I have a wish to attach you to my person, I increase your wages, and" he added in a low voice, "I have set you down in my will for a good round sum."

"Good gracious, how kind master is! how kind he is!" repeated the servant aloud. "What has happened to-day," added he to himself; "I never saw him so generous before."

"I hope you will be grateful," said Father Anthony.

"You may be sure of that, sir!"

"You will devote yourself to me?"

"To the very death, sir."

"I don't want you to go quite so far as that, my boy; I only ask you to go and throw yourself in the fire for me. It is quite a trifle."

"Thank you, sir," replied James, going back a step or two; "I am quite warm enough as I am. Although I can scarcely keep life in me for the cold," he added in a low voice.

"You don't understand me," went on Father Anthony.

"I understand too much," said James.

"No; I am about to explain what is to be done. You know the Demon's Rock?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You will have to go there."

"Yes, Sir."

"You will see a hole into which you can glide, for you are not very fat."

"I can well believe it," said James to himself; "with the keep he gives me, a grasshopper might grow thin."

"You will by that reach a cavern, in the middle of which you will see an abyss full to the brim of raging flames."

"Oh, good gracious!" cried James, in alarm.

"Don't be afraid," went on Father Anthony; "there is no danger at all. Do you see this abyss?"

"Yes, Sir;" replied the shuddering James.

"You will place yourself on the brink."

"There I am."

"Then you will gather yourself up for a moment."

"It is done, Sir."

"Well, then—leap down."

"Oh!" exclaimed James, who, in place of leaping, recoiled three paces, as if he had really seen before him an abyss of flame, ready to swallow him up. "What have I done to you, Sir, that you should desire my death?"

"Once more I tell you there is no danger of death. Those flames are harmless."

"Is master sure of that?"

"Quite sure; the genius of the place has himself trusted me with that secret."

"Then I will go to the Demon's Rock."

"And throw yourself in the furnace?"

"Yes, Sir; but is it quite certain that——"

"Yes, I tell you; what a coward you are!"

"One must be afraid sometimes. But that makes no difference: here I am, with my mind made up, and quite ready, since master is certain that there is no danger. When must I go?"

"The sooner the better."

"At once, if master likes."

"Very well, my boy. Go, you shall not find me ungrateful. I will make you rich; and you shall have a servant of your own."

"I will go and get myself ready, and come back. Ah! how good master is," added James, to himself, as he went out; "how kind he is — to-day."

"At last I shall be delivered from these annoyances," said Father Anthony to himself. "It will cost me dear; but I have not yet stated any definite sum, and I may be able to get out at a small expense. And then, little monster," he added, as he gazed into the fire, "I shall mock at you!"

"Not yet," said the little man on a sudden, darting from the fire, and hooking himself like a curl on Father Anthony's ear, where he balanced himself, with a series of somersaults, that drew the most piercing cries from Father Anthony. "Not yet," repeated he; "for you have not told all, you liar! If you do not add my observation, your servant will perish, and you will not be saved. I have you now, and I hope to keep you yet. So,—good-bye, till I see you again." And, with a bite on his ear, that drew blood, he returned to his fiery abode.

"That is true," thought Father Anthony, as he rubbed his ear, "I have forgotten that word of advice. But I will go and repair that forgetfulness, and then, accursed red dwarf, I can, in my turn, laugh in your face."

"Here, I am all ready, Sir," said his servant, who came in just at the moment.

"Good, my lad. Here, drink this glass of good Old Port, to give you strength."

"Thank you, Sir;" said James, drinking it. "Master is the best master I know; and I would suffer myself to be killed for him."

"You are a brave fellow," said Father Anthony; "but there is no necessity to get yourself killed. You will not suffer at all; it is only wicked people that the flames can touch; those who have grave faults to reproach themselves with, as, for example, the having robbed a master, suspected evil of a neighbour, and the like. Ah! fellows such as these, would be roasted like so many legs of mutton. But you, my boy, you have nothing to fear. You have always been faithful to me, and never wished any thing but good to all the world, and to me above all, my good James. So go there quickly; and good bye, my friend, until I see you again."

All the while Father Anthony was speaking, the face of James saddened. He called to mind the wine of which he had robbed his master; he remembered how often he had wished him buried a hundred feet under the earth; and other faults that made him afraid. He could see himself already in the middle of the flames, burning and tortured; and fancied he could feel the burning coals all over his body.

"Come, James," said Father Anthony, "go quick, my boy; when you return you shall be a rich man."

Father Anthony sat down as if James was going. But this latter remained, without moving from his place, twisting his cap in his hands.

"Well, what do you want, now?" said his Master, seeing that he did not go out.

"Master," replied the puzzled servant, "Master, it is because ——"

"What for? Who stops you?"

"I wish to tell Master, that ——. Is Master quite sure that the fire does not scorch?"

"Yes, I tell you, I am sure; it does no harm to honest folk."

"Ah!—to honest folk."

"Yes, doubtless; and you are an honest fellow, are you not?"

"Certainly, Master; but ——"

"But! why 'but' again?"

"It is this, Master—one can never be quite sure ——"

"Of being an honest fellow! Why not say so at once. Is it possible you have ever done anything to reproach yourself with?"

"Oh no, Sir, on the contrary. But ——"

"But—always but!—Is it because you have not been faithful? Is it that you have stolen anything from me?"

"Me, Master? Never!"

"What have you done, then?"

"Nothing, Sir; but ——"

"You are insufferable with your 'buts.' You have robbed me, you have cheated me, what have you taken?"

"Nothing at all."

"You have taken my money, I tell you, you bad fellow. Where is it? Where have you put it? There is yet time to amend. Give it me back, and I will forgive you all."

"I have taken nothing, Sir."

"What is that?" said Father Anthony, who caught sight of the end of a piece of silk that he knew was his, hanging out of his servant's pocket. "Do you see that,

wretch?" added he, as he siezed the silk; "you are robbing me."

"I thought Master had given it to me."

"How, traitor—you thought. I think, myself, you are a scoundrel, whom I have nourished to rob me."

"Nourish me! Yes, with the crumbs of your stale bread."

"What! do you complain, you marauder? You who owe me so much gratitude."

"Yes, for making me freeze in the winter, broil in the summer, and starve for the rest of the year."

"Oh! is it thus you reply to me. I will drive you away this very instant."

"It is all the same to me. I have no wish to remain with an old miser, an evil-doer, a hypocrite, a man whom I detest, a ——"

"Will you go out, viper that I have hatched in my bosom," Father Anthony cried again, but James had already left the room. When he was alone, and his anger had a little cooled down, he reflected on his situation, which he found to be even more sad than it was before. He found himself still alone, completely alone, without parents, without friends, without a servant. To crown his humiliation, he had just seen that he who had tricked all the world had been tricked in his turn, by the only being in whom he had placed any confidence. But the most distressing thought of all was—where to find an expiatory victim. To whom was he now to address himself?

All the world hated him. He began to feel how much a friend outweighed all other treasures, and that a wicked man, with all the wealth in the world, could not acquire that which the poorest man might gain from his goodness only. Thus he cruelly repented; and was in a fair train of lamenting, when he heard a little mocking laugh behind him. Turning round he saw the Little Red Man, who passed his head across the burning coals, as if across a window, and made a mocking grimace at him. He was tempted to put his hand in the fire, and seize him. Then he groaned, and he wept; and tore his hair, and called himself wicked, and criminal; and gave himself, in a word, all the bad titles he deserved.

IX.

LITTLE MARIA.

AT this moment there was a gentle rap at the door. He hesitated, astonished and afraid.

" This is some other new chastisement," said he to himself. " His evil genius wishes to add to my torments."

As he did not answer, the knock was heard again, and he went and opened the door himself.

It was Maria.

The poor child was pale and fragile; and you could see, in her eyes, traces of fatigue and want of sleep. Her clothes were neat and tidy, but worn and darned in many places. She wore nothing on her head, her last two bonnets having been sold to buy medicines for her mother, and her beautiful fair hair, as it fell down upon her shoulders, formed a graceful frame for her pallid countenance.

At sight of her, Father Anthony recoiled a step, like some guilty man, who suddenly finds himself brought face to face with his crime. His heart was stricken with a painful feeling, and a tear came up, scalding, to his scathed eyes.

The child approached him timidly, and with her gentle voice said,—

" Mr. Anthony, I have heard—I was not listening—but there was such a noise made—I have heard some one say that you were in need of a person to go. Oh! I assure you I was not listening—but I was in my bedroom and ____."

" I heard, quite against my will, some one tell you it was necessary that a person should go, in your place, to the Rock of the Demon; I will go there for you, if you like."

" But, do you know what that person has got to do at the Rock of the Demon?"

" Yes, Sir—they spoke so loud, and I was so afraid of waking Mamma ____"

" How? Are you aware that this person has to throw himself into the flames?"

" Yes, Sir."

" And you are willing to go there?"

" Certainly I am, Mr. Anthony."

Father Anthony hesitated, without moving or speaking, his eyes fixed on this child, who had said to him so innocently, " I am willing to go there; that is to say, I am willing to expose myself, for you, to the most cruel tortures, it may be even to death." And this child was the daughter of one whom he had robbed; whom he had ruined; and reduced to wretchedness. Remorse entered his heart, and he felt himself deeply humiliated, as he said to himself, " How much superior, from her good heart, is that young child, so frail, so innocent, and so wretched, to myself rich, clever, and old from age and experience." He could scarcely comprehend so much devotion; and thought he had before his eyes some angel just come down from heaven.

" You love me, then, well," said he, with hesitation.

At this question, which Maria had not expected, she cast down her eyes, and was not able to reply. Her silence fell like the stroke of a poignard on the heart of Father Anthony. It was a reproach, an accusation, that cut him cruelly. There was devotion, certainly, but not on his account.

" Fool that you are," said he to himself, as he drew his hand over his eyes, " you believed yourself loved, and every one hates you. Loved! Why should they love you? Who owes you any gratitude? Suffer, still suffer, but do not complain."

He went on again, addressing the young girl.

" In what cause, then, are you willing to expose yourself to the fire?"

" Because you will then come to the assistance of papa and mamma, who are so very unfortunate; for I thought if I rendered you this service —"

Father Anthony could listen no longer. These words, in the mouth of that pious child, recalled to him bitter recollections.

" Wretch!" said he to himself, " you also, you had a child; did it love you? Would it have gone thus far for

you to expose itself? Oh Heaven! I am now punished more — ”

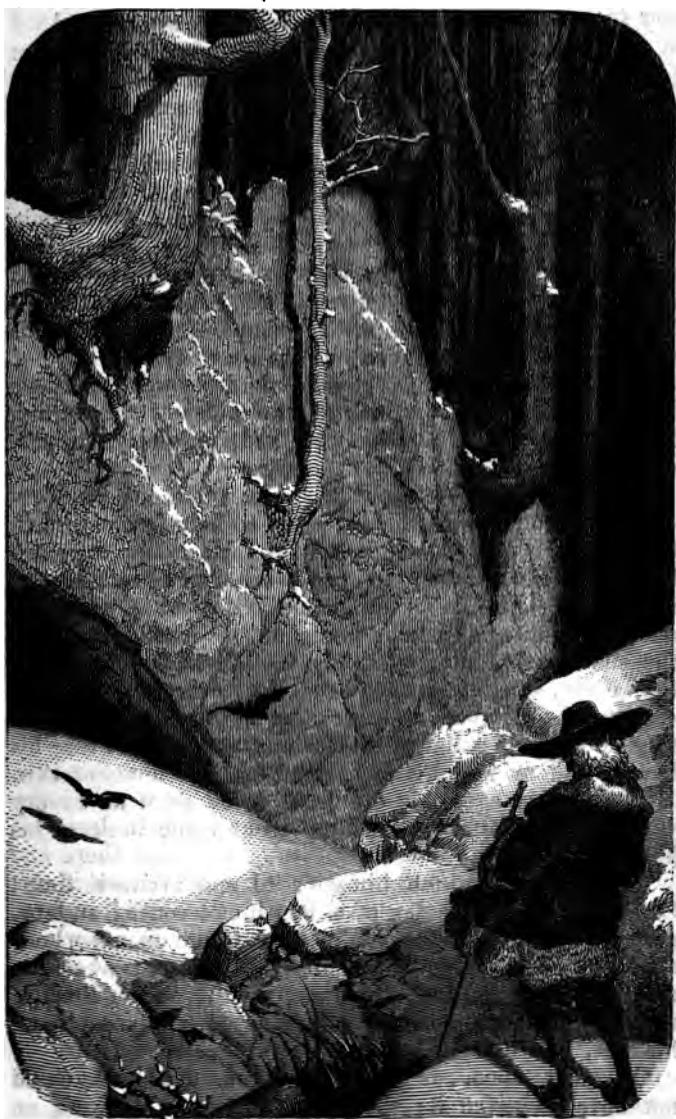
He was going to say “ more than I deserve; ” but his conscience cried out, “ thou hast deserved it.” He hastened to put an end to an interview that was reading his heart. He said to himself, that Maria, being so good and pure, could have nothing to fear, and that he might allow her to go. He promised her to supply her parents with every thing they needed, and bade her adieu. At the moment she went forth, he cast a glance of tenderness upon her. The child seemed to him so beautiful in her rags, so lovely in her goodness, her piety, her devotion—and his heart was agitated with an emotion so gentle, so strange, that he made a step towards her to embrace her. But he withheld himself; for a desolating thought arrested him; a terrible voice from the depths of his soul, cried out to him,—“No! vile man, thy touch would pollute her!”

X.

THE DEMON'S ROCK.

WHEN Maria had withdrawn, Father Anthony threw himself on a chair, and remained in deep dejection. He underwent a painful return into himself; his whole life seemed to rise up before him, and every bad action came back, following each other, like phantoms across a scene, to accuse him. He saw himself a prey to the hatred of all, and saw that this hatred was deserved. He confessed this himself, and the thought of it was his greatest torment.

At this moment, he heard a noise on his hearth. He turned round, expecting some yet new, though last punishment from his enemy, the Little Red Man: there was no one to be seen. But the coals were shaken as if the fire hearth was about to rise up and break. Soon, in fact, it opened in the centre, and, through the flames which darted from this opening, he saw a phantom, the vague outlines of which resembled the little Maria, and which vanished quickly. Then a hoarse voice cried, “I have cheated you; the flames of the Demon's Rock burn up everything; behold thy last crime; soon thou wilt be mine!”



At these words Father Anthony rose up, as one mad.

"Barbarous wretch!" he exclaimed, with fury; "thou hast made that innocent child to die for me, and thou accusest me of her death! But what am I saying? Ought I to have trusted to this monster? Ought I to expose a child for myself? What? I ruined her father; through me, her mother possibly is dying; and it is her I charge with the reparation of my crimes! Ah wretch, it is thou who oughtest to go to the Demon's Rock. It is thou who oughtest to suffer, thou who oughtest to die. But it may be she has not yet arrived there. Ah! if there might be yet time! At least I will try; and, if the sacrifice is accomplished, at least I can but die after her!"

Just then he saw in the middle of the hearth the Little Red Man, who was writhing in the midst of the flames, like a viper thrown into the fire, and, presently, he disappeared from sight.

Father Anthony lost no time. He seized his walking-stick; and, not finding his hat ready to hand, started forth bareheaded. They thought he was mad, when they saw him, his hair blowing in the wind, with rapid step, cross the village. As for him, he noticed nothing, he saw no one; he went on, he kept going on, his face chilled with the snow then falling, climbing the hill-sides, descending the valleys, slipping and nigh to falling every instant. To shorten the distance, he struck across the fields, and entangled himself amongst bushes and thorns, that tore his hands, and bruised his feet. But he felt none of this. He forgot his age; his old legs moved as if at twenty years, the fire of youth and its vigour came back to his heart.

"Courage," said he to himself; "I may arrive in time! Oh Heaven, for one day of strength and youth! and to-morrow—I will be what you please. Come on, now, poor old hams—one strong effort more! One last try! Fear not fatigue, O my feet! carry me, rapidly, to the Rock of the Demon; once there you can rest as long as you please; for ever, if it must be so."

On, on, he sped, and knew no fatigue. Cold? He could not have perceived it; the perspiration was standing on

his forehead. His staff in hand, his hair agitated by the wind and covered with snow, his eye fixed on objects in advance, he looked all round for the child, whom he was anxious to overtake. But, alas! nothing could be seen; nothing but the snow, which covered all the ground far and near, as well as the trees bending to the wind with plaintive murmurs. In this manner, he reached the forest. There he halted, and shouted with all his strength; nothing responded to his voice, but the dull and distant echoes of the wood. Onwards he still struggled, tearing his garments with the thorns, his face scored with the branches that, bent back for an instant, sprung again to their former position with sudden violence. At last, he attained to the Demon's Rock, which he knew thoroughly, from having often visited it in former times, while dreaming of his magic operations. He halted again—a horrible anxiety came over him. Was Maria still behind him? or had she already plunged within the rock? Perhaps at that moment she might be darting towards the abyss, and would die, cursing him, and without ransoming him. His heart beat violently, his head was in a whirl, his eyes were as if dazzled. At last, following up this impression, he stooped with great pain, and set to creeping along the narrow passage that was to conduct him to the furnace. Scarcely was he within it, when he heard, in the midst of the profound darkness, a sombre and sinister groaning, a formidable murmur, resembling that of a fire slowly devouring a house. This sound recalled to his mind what he had heard with such barbarous joy when his neighbour's house was burning, a recollection which added a new remorse to his conscience. He went forward, nevertheless; the sound grew louder every instant, and soon a feeble glimmer lighted up the vault. He would have called out yet once more, but his voice expired between his lips; his strength abandoned him; to his feverish ardour had succeeded a sudden torpor, caused by the fear of soon seeing an irreparable misfortune. His forehead was still covered with perspiration, but this had frozen. It was with difficulty he could drag himself along; and he despaired of being able to arrive there. He might be, even now, at some

distance from the cavern, for the light increased but feebly. Oh! with what pleasure would he, in that moment, have given all his treasures for one small portion of advance. Feeling himself, in crawling along, stopped by the rock, that made an elbow at this point, he turned aside and still advanced. On a sudden, a shining light filled the obscure passage, and compelled him to close his eyes. As soon as he could open them, he turned them towards the brink of the furnace, that was only a few steps from him. A moving spectacle struck his gaze. The flames came up with violence from the abyss, and mounted furiously into the vault above, which, at this part of the cavern, was very lofty. The noise they made, redoubled by the echoes of the cavern, resembled the roaring of some tempestuous sea. On the brink of the abyss was Maria, on her knees. Her long hair, agitated by the violence of the fire, floated over her naked shoulders. Her pallid face, illumined by the red glare of the furnace, seemed as if shining; her hands were joined together, and her eyes raised towards heaven; she appeared to be praying with fervour, as if commanding her soul to God, before delivering herself to the horrible gulf, that seemed to open like some immense Ghoul, ready to swallow her within its jaws. How beautiful did she then look! How beautiful and how touching!

Father Anthony wanted to rise up, to cry out and run to her; but an invisible force bound him to his place. All his limbs shook convulsively. He made enormous, but useless efforts to move himself. He was like a man, who, seized by some horrible nightmare, essays in vain to shake off the torpor that benumbs him. He could see everything, but do nothing. Never had a more dreadful punishment tormented him. Soon he saw the young girl make the sign of the cross, and rise up. She stepped back a few paces, as if to make her spring; then, closing her eyes, advanced rapidly towards the furnace.

XI.

THE GENIUS OF THE CAVERN.

FATHER ANTHONY experienced an inexpressible agony. A

grievous lethargy deprived him of all use of his powers. He thought he felt an enormous weight pressing down upon all his limbs, which he attempted in vain to shake off. It seemed to him, as if the efforts he made were as immense as if he had wanted to lift a mountain ; and yet he could not, for all this, move an arm. Compelled thus to be present, in spite of himself, hopeless and despairing, at the death of this child, who was about to devote herself for him, he experienced within himself a grief, to which he would have preferred any bodily suffering, however cruel.

At last, when he saw Maria rise up and dart towards the gulf, all the powers of his soul crowded round his heart, as if it were about to burst; so, making another and final effort, he sent forth a distracting cry. The charm was broken ! Recovering, at the same moment, the use of all his powers, he precipitated himself towards Maria, at the moment when, arrived at the brink of the flaming gulf, she had stooped herself, ready to drop in. With a violent and convulsive grasp, he caught her by the garments, and drew her within his arms, where he held her so closely that the child feared being strangled. Then, falling down exhausted—

“Oh, heaven !” he cried ; “thanks ; she is saved !”

Astonished at so sudden an appearance, and such impetuous movements of affection, Maria remained motionless and uncertain what to do ; while the old man, broken down by such painful emotions, essayed in vain to raise himself on his knees. At last, with the aid of the young girl, he managed to get up.

“My child,” he said ; “go—go quickly ! I desire not to bring upon you any new sorrow.”

“What is it you would do ?” said Maria, terrified at the distracted air of the old man.

“Leave me,” said he, “and save yourself quickly. Yet wait awhile ;” he went on, as he took from his pocket a pencil and scrap of paper.

After writing a few lines :—

“Take this,” he said to her, “and carry it to your mother.”

It was his will, in which he appointed the parents of Maria his heirs.

"And you, my dear child," he went on, in a voice of deep emotion; "you will sometimes recall to memory Father Anthony, and mingle his name sometimes in your prayers at evening, for your parents. Is it not so?"

Maria could not but notice the countenance of the old man. An unusual goodness was depicted on all his features; his eyes were wet with tears, his voice touching, and his forehead, encircled with some locks of grey hair, seemed to shine with a mysterious light. At sight of this the child was seized with a secret terror and a tender pity.

"Oh heaven! Mr. Anthony, what are you about to do?"

The old man made no reply. His eye fixed upon the gulf, from which rose the whirling flames. With that pallid visage and calm air, he seemed to be wrapt in his last thoughts. Then, as if he had been alone:—

"Come," said he, "let us end this! and my death, perhaps, may yet atone for my life."

Hereupon he advanced slowly towards the abyss. There was nothing in his features that betrayed the least anxiety. Suddenly, Maria saw him throw himself forward into the flames; she uttered a cry of horror, and shut her eyes; but, at the same instant, she felt a violent gust of wind, which forced her to fall back. She opened them.

Father Anthony was by her side, his features disordered, his eyes fixed on the furnace, which, more flaming than ever, had thrown him out on this spot, as if it wished to repulse its victim into life. From out the bosom of the abyss, a strange form was rising slowly. Soon it appeared in all its grandeur. Erect, in the midst of the flames, a Giant stood suspended over the gulf; his head circled with a coronet of diamonds, so brilliant, that their glitter outshone the flames and paled their light. His gaze was fixed on the old man and the young girl, who remained motionless, surprised and afraid. At last, addressing them in a voice that made the cavern tremble:—

"Old man," said he, "thy heart has been purified by

orse and suffering, and thy life ransomed by a noble lution. Go; then; the Spirit of Fire pardons thee! as for thee, sublime child, return to thy mother's , and calm her anxieties. Remember, both of you;— t, old man, that a good conscience is worth more than wealth; and thou, my daughter, that filial love is the f virtue and the finest ornament of a child!"

rom that day, Father Anthony lived happily with the ly of Maria, to whom he was anxious to act as a father, left to them the whole of his fortune.

FATHER BARBEL.

THE MARVELLOUS FISHING.

NCE upon a time there was an old fisherman, known in that part of the country where he lived as FATHER BAR- . No one could tell much of where he came from ; and, or himself, why he knew little more than the rest. All could rememb̄er was, that, from the time he had been or twelve years old, he had lived on the banks of the e river, passing his days in fishing, and sleeping some- es in the open air, sometimes in the barn of a neigh- ring farm, and at other and harder times, in a forge in neighbourhood. In the course of time, he built him- on a little islet, hardly more than twenty feet long, a l of wood, thatched with reeds ; and this islet became to , his country and his kingdom, where he reigned, with totic authority, over a dog, a cat, three fowls, and e dozen or so of ducks, with whom he often prome- ed the river bank. All his subjects were under im- it submission, with the exception, however, of certain abitants of his domain, who lived in a perpetual state insurrection against his authority ; these were the er-rats, a stubborn and independent race, who revolted nst his dog, chased his cat off the field, and devoured fowls' eggs. Father Barbel waged continual war with

them ; and stretched out nets for them, which they cut through like thread ; and traps of osier, which they gnawed with their sharp teeth. However, by the aid of his dog and his iron-pronged staff, he managed to get enough of them together to make out of their skins a large and frightful cap, with which to cover his bald head triumphantly.

This strange head-gear, with his long, grisly beard, gave him the look of one of those wild men that children are frightened with ; although, as far as he was himself concerned, Father Barbel was rarely seen wandering out of his own domains. The river and banks seemed all to belong to him. During the day, he would be mending and setting his nets, sharpening his harpoon, casting lead weights for his net, or making small baskets, which he went about selling in the neighbourhood : sometimes, also, he slept ; and, very often, he would lay himself down in the sun, and do nothing except feel tired of doing nothing. But, when evening came on, he woke to his real life, and the night was his best time. As soon as that dark, yet bright-eyed lady had cast over the water her sombre and mysterious mantle, Father Barbel would take his nets, get into his little boat, and rummage the river in every sense. Not a winding, not a hole, not a corner of the stream, but was known to him quite as well as to the fish.

One day, or, rather, one night, he had passed full three long hours on the water without getting a single haul, and was beginning to grumble, and use some forcibly unkind expressions, both as regarded fishermen and fish in general, when, having cast his net for the last time, he felt the cord shake in his hand. This was always a delicious moment for old Father Barbel. He felt, at such times, all the ardent emotion and eager anxiety of a miser who scents out a treasure. As soon as his net had touched the bottom he tasted the cord, that was his own expression, as much as to say, he stretched it rigid, and gave it one or two shakes to disturb the fish which might be there ; if a trembling of the cord followed upon these shakings, it was a good sign. "She answers." Thus this was a moment of very agreeable emotion, since, after three hours

useless research, he felt "it answered." Besides, the answer was of a strong kind: the shaking was rapid and violent, such as threatened to drag the cord out of his hands.

"Hello!" said Father Barbel to himself; "there is a handsome prisoner down there."

He stopped an instant to enjoy his emotion, and have another "taste" of his cord. The shaking began again, and with still greater violence.

"Yes, yes," said he, "I hear you my friend! Come now, not so much of that knocking about. You shall shake yourself for a whole hour, when in my boat, if you like. Again! Ah! Ah! He is a strong fellow that; he ought to weigh about fifteen pounds, or I am mistaken; and it is a pike, I am sure. I should like it to be that very chap that escaped me the other night by cutting my net. Ah! this time, my young pickle, you have got your work to do, but you won't get out."

Father Barbel kept on talking to himself after this fashion, for some time longer; for, though it was perfectly useless, there being no one to hear or understand him, it yet afforded him an opportunity of prolonging his delicious expectation. At last he determined to take his net out of the river, and let it fall, all dripping, into his boat. Then, lifting up the lead and the meshes, he saw a great fish, with an enormous head, that regarded him with a sly look. The fact is, this inhabitant of the waters had a real face, with great green eyes, a narrow muzzle, a little gullet that bore some resemblance to a mouth, and a lower jaw-bone that would have answered very well as a chin.

"I don't know this gentleman," said Father Barbel, as he ran his eyes over the fish with much anxiety; he is neither a trout, nor a carp, and, certainly, not a pike; what can he be? Ah! there you are, my big one!" added he, as he leant over his prisoner, "where do you come from? out of what river? or what lake? for you are not of our parts, I am quite certain. Perhaps you came from the sea; but the sea is a very long way from here. After all, what does it matter where you come from; here you are now with me. But this is a droll fellow; he does not look at all as if he were astonished."

The fish, in fact, kept his eye steadily upon the fisherman ; and, strange to say, had the appearance of laughing in his face.

"Pon my word!" said the fisherman to himself, with astonishment, "that fish there looks to me like a joker. I must have a look at him closer, to-morrow, in the broad daylight."

Hereupon he threw the fish into a kind of box, which formed the stem of his boat, and was kept full of water. On his arrival at his hut, he drew the fish out of his prison, for fear he would kill himself by his somersaults against the sides, and threw him into a store-pond that he had dug by the side of his house, and where he kept alive such fish as he was not going to sell for some time.

"It is curious!" he said to himself, as he went to bed, "it is rather hard to have lived fifty years on a river, and yet not know all its inhabitants."

II.

THE WATER-SPRITE.

WITH the first glimmer of the dawning day Father Barbel got up. All the while he was putting on his clothes (and that was not very long) he was thinking of the fish he had caught the night before.

"What can it possibly be," said he to himself. "I have taken some trouble to rummage my old memory, but I can't call to mind having ever seen a fish of this species. But, now it is daylight, I will go and examine him better, and see after what fashion he conducts himself in the water."

He went straight to his store-pond. What was his astonishment at seeing, right in the middle of the water, a child, who swam like a fish, and was plunging and turning over, and playing down there, like a bird in the air. He gazed on him for an instant, without speaking a word, so great was his surprise.

"Faith," said he at last, "he is a grand swimmer. I know a few carp to whom this young lad there might give one or two points, and he dives, just look at him, like a water-hen."

During this time, the child continued playing in the store-pond, disappearing and re-appearing by turns, picking a flower, catching the butterflies, as they flew over the surface of the water, and pursuing the fishes, who did not seem as if they were afraid of him. It was, to all appearance, a merry little creature ; his hair was golden, like the leaves of autumn rushes ; his eyes of a tender green, and with a slight grimace, which gave him a wicked look, that was pleasant to look upon.

"I have quite enough to do to stare at you," said the Old Fisherman, more and more surprised : "I never saw but one child. This is quite a child. Little one, who are you ? Where do you come from ? Tell me that, my boy, and then you shall teach me to swim like you do, for you have a famous stroke to boast of, and I assume that the first swimmers have not one like yours."

The child remained motionless, his head out of the water, as if he were hanging by the surface, and applied himself to gazing at Father Barbel; but still without speaking a word.

"Well, now, will you answer me," said the latter.

The child still kept silence, his large eyes fixed upon the fisherman.

"Are you dumb ? Give me some sign that means Yes or No."

The same immobility, and the same silence.

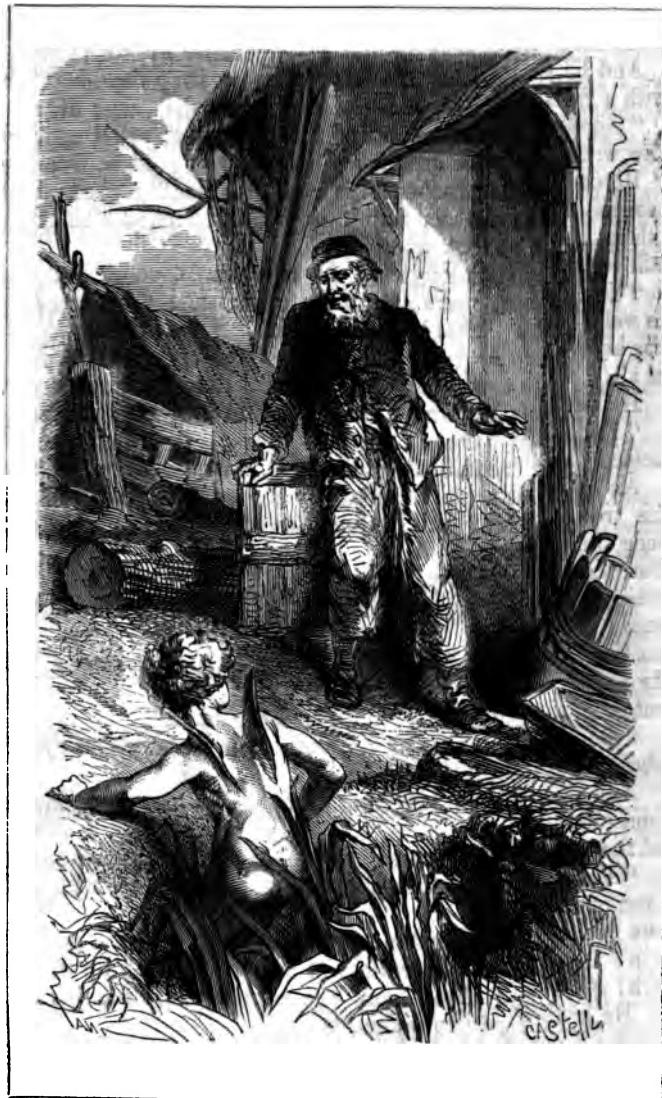
"How you do stare at me with your great green eyes ! Answer me now."

The child set to laughing ; but still without saying a word.

"Ah, that's it ; I think you are making fun of me, my little droll. Wait awhile, we are now going to see who will laugh the last."

He went into his cabin, and came back with his casting net, a portion of the meshes of which he took up in his right hand, and threw back the other point over his left shoulder, all ready to make his cast.

"You can see my casting net plainly," said he to the child, with a threatening gesture, "it runs all over the store-pond ; I am going to throw you on your back, if



you don't answer me. Once—twice—thrice. Ah, you mock me. Take care of yourself, look out, young pickle."

And he threw the casting net, and it struck the water with a rattling splash.

"Good," said he, "I have caught you, my little duck; now we can have it out at once."

He drew out his casting net at once, and threw it on the grass; but found in it only a crowd of fishes, and among others, that one he had caught the night before, and which still regarded him with a sly look.

"Yes, my fine fellow," said he, "I recognise you as well. But that young rogue, I don't see him. How has he been able to escape me. I can't comprehend this at all."

He cast the net a second time; but again no child.

"Faith," said he, "this is getting dröll. It can't be helped, I must keep a good heart about it."

And while speaking, he took off his boots, tucked up his trowsers, and went into the water. He searched a long time, and went over every corner of his store-pond, but found nothing. During this time, the great fish, which he had left on the bank, floundered about, and made great bounds on the grass. Fearing it was about to leap back into the river, he went to look after it, when by a more violent exertion than heretofore, it sprang up into the air, and fell back again into the store-pond.

"Good," said Father Barbel, "Though you are down there; you are quite right now."

And he went on with his search. Suddenly, he felt himself sharply pricked in his feet, his calves, his legs, all at the same time.

"Faith," said he, "I must have thrust myself into some nest of crabs. After all, I don't see him here. Ah! these are not crabs, this is a bite. Have my pikes revolted? Oh! they are all going at my legs, these scabby rascals! Oh! oh! oh!"

He hastened out of the water, to avoid their bites; but at the moment when, with one foot resting on the bank, he was just drawing up the other leg, he found himself caught by the foot.

"Hallo! what's that, what's that?" he exclaimed, in a fright.

He turned round and saw the child, who had caught hold of his foot, and was laughing with all his might.

"How, you little rogue," said he, "was it you that held me so tight? Where do you come from now? But, first, let me go; will you let me go, I tell you."

The child kept on laughing, still holding the good man in this critical position.

"He grips like a vice," said the latter, in astonishment. Who could think that with little hands like those, this young pickle could hold back a river-wolf like me. Another pinch! you rascal, let me go, or I will—— Oh! Oh! you grasp me like an otter trap."

"He will laugh best who laughs the last," said the child, upon this, releasing his foot.

"Ah, you have recovered your speech!"

"Yes, Father Barbel."

"What! you know me?"

"A long while."

"Really, where have you seen me?"

"For fifty years past, every night on the river."

"Fifty years! How old are you then?"

"Well, I shall be two hundred and sixty-five years old, come next Martinmas. That begins to reckon up, don't it?"

Father Barbel gazed attentively on the child, whose rosy face did not bespeak more than ten years at the utmost.

"My poor little fellow," said he, "I am sorry to tell you that I am afraid you are talking nonsense."

"No more than you are, Father Barbel, you who did not recognise me, though you saw me only an instant ago."

"Is it only an instant ago?" said the old fisherman, fixing his eyes on the child, "I have not been here longer than that. Yet—no, it is impossible. Yet you resemble my big fish as much as a drop of the river water does a drop of the pond water. There—there it is; the nose—the little mouth—the green eyes—all are there. Is it

possible that you are a hobgoblin ? Ah, my boy, tell me it once, for I don't want to have anything to do with any agents of the Evil One."

" Nay, re-assure yourself," said the child, " I am a Good Genius, a water-sprite of your own river, and I came to protect you, since you have great need of it at this moment."

" Do you mean that I am menaced with any danger?"

" I am here to tell you of it; but first, I must get out of this."

" Wait a moment, while I fetch you a blouse and boots."

" Pray don't trouble yourself in that matter, I will go and gather myself a complete suit."

And at one leap, the child darted towards the river, into which he plunged; but soon re-appeared with a vest of rushes artistically woven, trousers of water-moss, and two large leaves of the water-lily for shoes, which were laced round his feet, and made excellent short shoes, and lastly, on his head, a crown of reed flowers.

III.

THE KING OF THE PIKES.

" WELL now ! this is what they call buying clothes at a good market," said Father Barbel, when he saw the child come back thus accoutred ; " you must teach me how to get myself dressed in this style, for it will be a rare saving to me. You must give me some lessons, also, in your stroke in swimming. Ah ! I hold you to teaching me that stroke ; when a man can swim as you do, he need have no fear of the water. Faith ! how you did flutter about down there ; there is not a swimmer in all the country who has a chance with you, my little—— What do they call you?"

" Watersprite; I told you so before."

" That's not a name."

" I have none other, however."

" Then we must be content with that, my boy. Well now, my little Watersprite. By the bye what is a Watersprite."

" An old fisherman like you ought not to be ignorant of that. The Watersprites are the Genii of the water, as

the name points out. We live at the bottom of the springs; and our duty is to feed them, and to care for the freshness and the clearness of their water; we live, without growing old, so long as runs the spring which our King confided to our care. But if by any negligence, we allow it to stop, we die along with it. This will explain to you how I appear young, in spite of my two hundred and sixty-five years."

"And have you then been the Watersprite of our river, all the while I have fished in it?"

"Yes; I generally live up at the source, and often take a walk over its waters.

"And I am menaced, you told me, with some great danger. What is it that I have to fear?"

"Have you observed that for the last month business has gone badly with you? That your fishing has not been prosperous?"

"That is true; I take nothing but the small fry; too glad indeed, when I can catch them."

"And that one time in your store-pond, all the fish there sickened and died?"

"True again; but how did you know that?"

"I will tell you very soon. You remember also, that about a month since, you caught in your casting-net, for an instant, only, however, an enormous pike?"

"Yes; it must have weighed thirty pounds at least. And it must have had famous teeth, for it tore my net, so that it was impossible for me to mend it. But I will be revenged of the scoundrel yet."

"Take good care what you do."

"Why so?"

"You are a lost man if you ever try to catch him again."

"Ah, that's it. Who, then, is this monster?"

"The King of the Pikes!"

"Faith, I never suspected I had caught a king in my casting-net. Only faney, if I had kept him, and should have sold him to His Majesty for twenty shillings!"

"From that moment," went on the Water-sprite, "the King of the Pikes, greatly irritated against you, has

sought to do you injury. He follows you about without your perceiving it ; he plays the spy upon you, and searches how to draw you into some snare. Listen well to what I recommend. If by any chance you see him, throw him a few small fish to appease his hunger. Above all, never go near the Great Lake. You must also abstain from catching pikes for one month ; and, if you find them, throw them back into the water. Do not allow yourself to be carried away, by the ardour of fishing, or the King of the Pikes may be able to lure you into his dominions, and then I don't know how I can get you out of them. In any case, whenever you may be in danger, give me notice of it by brandishing over the water a torch of burning resin, and shouting out 'Water-sprites ! Water-sprites ! save the old fisherman.' "

"I thank you, my boy, for this warning and protection. I must confess, however, that it all seems to me exceedingly droll ; and, besides, I shall never bring myself to confess that an old otter, like me, can be afraid of a pike."

"Be prudent, Father Barbel ; the water-sprites protect you ; but these are not all-powerful ; and there are plenty of dangers at the bottom of the waters."

"Be easy, my handsome protector ; I know the river, just as well as my own house."

"Too much confidence comes to ruin. Adieu, Father Barbel, good luck to you, and may you never stand in need of my help."

At these words the Water-sprite started out of the cabin with a bound, plunged into the river, and was lost from the wondering gaze of the old fisherman, as he said,—

"Beware of the Great Lake!"

IV.

THE WITCH OF THE WATERS.

"THE Water-sprite is right," said Father Barbel, one day, to himself, while emptying his nets, in which a multitude of fishes were leaping about. Ever since I have followed his advice, the carps come, as if of their own accord, under my casting-net, the eels wriggle into my pots, and all this sort of thing makes a good market. Faith, I shall soon be able to take a holiday."

Then he took out of a huge tobacco-box of shell a quid, which he chewed with much deliberation, and next began to hum an old tune, that had, as he pretended, the power of charming and attracting the fishes. As he walked along the banks of the river, and, like all fishermen, he had an eye for anything besides, although he knew every inch of it, he said, as if it were his own house. We cannot take upon ourselves to pronounce whether his monotonous song had really the effect of charming the inhabitants of the waters; but it is a fact, that Father Barbel could see them glide along and play at the bottom of the river, as if there were no one witnessing their sports. The sight of this was one of the grand delights of the old fisherman. He amused himself, on such occasions, with noticing the different species of fish, studying their habits, and divining the direction they were about to take, and to what corner they were about to withdraw. He would speak to them as beings of his own species, without frightening them, well aware of the fisher's proverb, *That fishes can swim though they can't talk.*

"Oh, what a noble trout," said he; "see how it hides itself under the grass; it is watching its prey. Look out, young gudgeon, you who are playing in the middle of the river: this is not the time for childish gamboling, my lad. There you see her, how gently she glides along, the traitress! Save yourself—be quick—save yourself, poor little one—or, by Jove!—Puff! there he goes—caught—vanished—swallowed: so much the worse for you, little fool, after the warning I gave you. But, if it be any comfort to you, I will avenge you; this night yon ogress shall be in my stock-pond."

He kept on walking thus, for some time, following the fish with his eyes, and talking to them, all the while humming his old ditty. After he had marked down the spots where the fish were most numerous, he went back to his hut, got ready his fishing implements, and awaited the coming of night. Towards ten o'clock, he came forth, threw into the boat his casting-net, his torch, and his lantern, and sculled gently up the stream.

He caught, in no great time, a decent number of fish,

but all of them of small size; then pushed along to the spot where he had marked down the trout. Here he made many a cast with his net, but without catching anything.

"I must find her, at any rate," said he; "she can't be far from this spot." He went up the river, for some time, then drew in his oars, and left the boat to glide silently down the current of herself, on the surface of the water. All this while, lantern in hand, and leaning over the boat's head, he explored, with scrutinizing gaze, the bottom of the river, a trick of fishing he had cunningly taken to, from having learnt that by night fish are attracted; and, as it were, fascinated by any bright light. All on a sudden he saw a head pop out from under a mass of grass.

"That is my trout," said he to himself; "we have got it all to our two selves, my dear, so let us make each other's acquaintance at once."

So he stopped his boat, hung his lantern on the bow, spread out his casting-net, and threw it over the tuft of grass which it completely enveloped.

"Caught!" he exclaimed, with glee.

Before taking up his net out of the water, he gave himself the pleasure of "tasting" the cord as we have before described; but, how great was his surprise at finding it motionless, and at receiving no reply.

"This is funny. But it must be down there. Come along, old lady, don't pretend to be dead; come here, and show us your agility."

He drew up his casting-net into the boat, and lifted up the lead; there was nothing at the bottom.

"Faith," said he, in disgust, "it's myself that's caught; but how could she have got away? However, I have caught enough for to-day, and will trap her some other time."

He was just turning back, when he heard the reeds rattle at his side, and, leaning over to the spot, saw the trout, distinctly, threading its way among the rushes, as it went up the current. It seemed now even larger than before.

At this sight he felt his ardour redoubled.

"I will have her," he cried, "even though I must follow her to the depths of the sea."

So he took up his sculls, and followed the direction taken by the trout. Three or four hundred paces from there the river divided into two channels; the left branch was a kind of narrow canal, leading to the Great Lake.

"Hollo!" said he, stopping himself; "we don't go any farther. The Water-sprite would not like it. Besides, that abominable Mother Trout must be just here; it is wide and deep: there she is, right in the middle; I will make her show up."

He made some more casts with his net, all in vain! So he began to feel irritated at such fruitless exertion, while the pursuit after this victim, which always escaped him, became a matter of pride and almost of honour to him. In the persuasion, that the trout had taken the right arm of the river, he remained without moving, and kept his eye on that side, as if some invisible power attracted him. He was well aware, that the Great Lake offered magnificent resources to an old fisherman, such as himself; and the warnings his young protector had given him, began to be rubbed off his memory, while his eye sparkled with such impatience as the war-horse shows when it hears the trumpet call, and scents the battle from afar.

He was a prey to this kind of hesitation, when a sharp blow struck on his lantern, caused him to turn his head round, and he saw, falling back into the river, a large fish, that by a violent leap had darted out of the water, so near to him as to strike his lantern.

"Hallo!" was all he could say. He leant over the water and saw the trout, which was going up the canal on the right. At sight of this he could contain himself no longer; his passion was roused, on the instant, in all its force, and his resolution was taken.

"This is going too far!" he exclaimed. "I do believe that trout was mocking me. Now then, no more hesitating; forward's the word, and if all the pikes in the world come against me, I am ready for them."

So he seized his sculls, and rowed with a vigorous arm in the direction of the Great Lake, whither the trout had

preceded him. At the moment of his entering the canal on the left, a small voice sang in a clear gentle voice out of a clump of reeds:—

“Fisher, of the witch beware!
Fisher, be quick, and say a prayer!
The fish to-night will be your match,
For the fish their fisher now will catch!”

But he did not pay much attention to this song. Leaning to his oars, he pulled and tugged away with a kind of fury, until some moments after he was entering the Great Lake.

V.

THE GREAT LAKE.

This was an immense Lake, shut in, along its whole length between the sides of a deep gorge, where the winds sometimes were engulfed with such violence as to raise up the waters like waves of the sea. Reeds with their large leaves, enormous rushes, water-lilies with their long stems, rendered the navigation here both difficult and dangerous. The centre formed a vast whirlpool; such is the name given, in that neighbourhood, to a deep and narrow gully, where the waters rush in, tumbling over one another in turbulent waves; and, attracted by some hidden abyss, turn and whirl over each other, in the shape of a funnel.

It was a very dangerous spot. If any imprudent swimmer came too near it, he found himself drawn within the eddy of the whirlpool, where no human effort would avail to save him. He was carried round, for a time, with the water on the top of the gulf; then the abyss sucked him down quickly, whirling him fantastically round and round, like a top. There were but few fishermen who would venture on this lake, of which they told all sorts of stories. It was full, they said, of all kinds of monsters, such as the sea never saw. Crabs, old as the rocks and as big as porpoises, wandered about in its depths; unknown fish floated in its waters, and the grasses and the weeds trembled continuously, as their branches were shaken by concealed beings. A herdsman, who, one night, had wan-

dered that way, told of his having seen a tall white man walking on the water. It was in vain to laugh at him, and say, that what he had taken for a phantom, could only be a mass of vapour, which the moon was shining upon and the wind driving along. Recitals like this, spread over the country, had rendered the gorge in which the Great Lake was encased almost deserted.

It was a superb night at the time Father Barbel arrived there. Not even a whisper ruffled the surface of the water, that shone in the moonlight like an immense plate of silver. The sky, unspotted by a cloud, was reflected in the depths of the lake, with all its stars; while a thousand small, mysterious and confused sounds, that filled the air, formed a harmonious murmur in the distance. This glorious spectacle struck the old Fisherman; he pulled along more slowly. Soon the calm of this dark valley seemed to weigh heavy on him; a vague feeling of terror came over his spirit. By degrees, all the murmurs were at rest, and there was silence, dead and immeasurable, over the waters. Father Barbel was almost afraid of the sound of his oars, which made the waters groan, and alone troubled the solemn calm. He stopped and cast his eyes around; it seemed to him as if he could perceive, far, far down the valley, a form, uncertain and white, rising above the waters. They were the vapours of night, mounting into the air. Father Barbel knew this, and yet he could not help thinking of the phantom in the old man's story. Soon, a little blue flame was seen to rise along the banks of the lake, mount gently into the air, then descend and vanish in the water. Another succeeded, then another yet, and, in an instant, the valley appeared to be filled with these fires, which rose, came down, crossed each other in every direction, and spread over the surface of the lake a pale and undecided light, that gave it the appearance of some naked and desolate plain, lighted by a winter sky.

Father Barbel was gazing with astonishment on all these blue flames dancing on the waters, when he saw a human form rapidly dart athwart the mass of them, and dash across the lake. It was a young girl, whose long fair hair, lighted up by these glimmers, fluttered about her as

She went, her blue robe floated in waving folds upon the wind. She glided on the surface of the lake with a marvellous agility, and seemed to fly like a sea-gull, as it skims, on the wing, the summit of the waves. Others followed her quickly, and, like her, set to running over the lake, in pursuit of each other, and ringing bursts of laughter, that sounded like the limpid sounds given out by musical glasses. Children also were seen mingling with the merry group, and they wound themselves altogether into a choral dance, in cadence with the music of the distant harmony of sounds. Father Barbel looked for a long while at their graceful gambollings with each other, as they glided over the water like light skaters over the ice, the will-o'-the-wisps, all the while, casting over them a wandering and capricious light. Soon, he saw them range themselves in a circle, and heard them singing to the accompaniment of unknown instruments.

"It is night! The bird sleeps on the bough; the zephyr sings among the reeds; the green hills are exhaling their white cloud robes of wreathing mist. Come forth, ye Spirits of the Waters! let us dance upon the streams.

"Night has spread her veil o'er the waters. To the bosom of the lake, where shines the reflected heaven, come, Spirits of the Waters! and let us gather the stars, the golden stars, which, down there, smile upon us!

"The wildfires are flying all over the deep valleys; the water is full of mysterious sounds. Come, ye Spirits of the Wave! Let us dance, fair Spirits! Let us weave the pale and silent chorus of the night!"

Father Barbel listened with delight to the limpid and melodious voices, sent back to him, softened and dying, by the echoes of the valley. He quite forgot his fishing.

The song ceased. The young girls and the children seemed to be speaking together, and pointed with their fingers to the horizon. During this time, a thick cloud, like a blot, ascended, expanding as it rose, upon the starry sky. The wind began to rise. Father Barbel, who, with his looks fixed on these beautiful apparitions, was all eyes and ears, felt his boat suddenly agitated by a tumult of little waves, that beat against the side of his frail bark.

This circumstance brought back his attention to his fishing. He took his lantern and leant over the waves; a multitude of fishes were taking their airing round his boat, and came to meet together under his lantern. Quickly he unfolded



his net, and made a cast. The net plunged in, and plunged in so much in advance, that Father Barbel felt the cord that held it, fastened to his arm, draw him down towards the water. He leant over as far as he could, to

enable it to reach the bottom, but this was in vain ; the drag-net remained suspended in the void of waters.

"Hallo!" said he, this is a famous hole; I never before met with such deep water."

"He drew up his casting-net, and took to his oars again in search of a more favourable place. The fishes continued to follow his boat; and Father Barbel could distinctly see the trout, as it swam at their head, and appeared to lead them. The sight of this irritated him: this trout had become, in regard to him, an enemy, of whom he must, at any price, make a prisoner. He halted, and hung his lantern on the bow of the boat, to attract the adversary, who was always avoiding him.

Meantime, the small cloud had mounted up to the sky, and rapidly increased in size. One by one the stars disappeared under it; the moon was veiled; the darkness became still deeper; and the Will-o'-the-Wisps could hardly be seen, as in the far off distance they crossed to the right. The wind growled sullenly between the sharp sides of the valley, and raised the waves, which, every moment, mounted higher and higher.

At this instant, Father Barbel again heard the fair phantoms, of the lakes as they took up again their interrupted song. But this time, their voices seemed trembling and uneasy, while the song, more hurried, more hurried, by degrees sank into the distance.

Here comes the king, the king of the water deep,
At sight of whom the lake shakes off its sleep,
The storm's let loose, the monsters from below,
Rise to their monarch's voice. We water-sprites must go !

VI.

A NIGHT-STORM.

They all vanished quickly. A profound darkness enveloped the valley, that abutted on the lake. Thunder began to mutter in the distance, and, coming nearer by degrees, made the old rocks in the valley tremble. At the same moment, lightnings furrowed the sky, and multiplied with such rapidity, that the lake, whose rising

waves shone with livid brightness, had the appearance of an immense furnace.

In the midst of this terrible tempest, the poor little boat of the old fisherman was tossed up like a nutshell to the tops of the waves, and quickly came tumbling down again, as if it was going to be swallowed up. Father Barbel, however surprised at such a sudden discord of the elements, did not lose his presence of mind or his courage. He took to his oars again, and prepared to turn back. But the violence of the waves and the wind, which was against him, drove him, in spite of all his efforts, towards the centre of the lake. The lightnings ceased at intervals, and then the unfortunate man had to row at hazard, in the midst of such a fearful night, without knowing whither his efforts were taking him. Suddenly a terrific clap of thunder made the whole valley tremble ; while an immense flash of lightning came down from the cloud like a torrent of fire, engulfing itself in the lake, the depths of which it all at once lit up. By the glimmer which this kind of blaze threw out, Father Barbel saw a crowd of fishes pressed so close together that they seemed to form a compact mass. In the middle of them an enormous pike, with a black back and powerful fins, was cleaving the waters, which raised up his large tail; a crown of blood was marked on his head; his eyes shone like lightning, and his long jaws, which opened and shut alternately, swallowed each time twenty fishes at once.

"Hollo!" exclaimed Father Barbel, "that's the gentleman ! It is the King of the Pikes. Into what new hole have I squeezed myself ? Look at him, how he comes at me with all his court. Is it possible that he can wish to attack me ? Very well, let him come ! It shall never be said that a pike, however big, was able to make Father Barbel recoil."

Just as he had ended these bold words, he saw, at a few paces from him, the monster open his gullet, bristling with long and sharp teeth. He seized his harpoon ; it was a solid trident of iron, fitted on to a long staff, which a cord held fastened to his arm. At the moment when the pike closed his jaw, and swallowed his prey, Father Barbel

raised his arm, and darted at him, with all his force, this iron harpoon.

"Take your death," cried he.

On a sudden the water boiled up; the harpoon rebounded violently in the air, and fell back perpendicularly into his boat, which it transfixes like an arrow; at the same time, the head of the monster appeared above the waves, with his bloody crown and his flaming eyes.

The old fisherman, terrified, threw himself back. The boat danced and twisted at the mercy of the waves; the water began to come in by a leak which the harpoon had opened; a few instants more and he would have sunk. He hastened to bale out the water, and resumed his oars.

The pike had disappeared. A fearful darkness reigned on the lake. Father Barbel tried in vain, in the midst of such obscurity, to find out his position. Where was he? He had no power of knowing, and he began to be discouraged at thinking that every effort he made was probably carrying him still farther out of his right road. On a sudden, the lightnings began again with a terrible violence, and by their light the old fisherman saw, to his horror, that he was not more than a couple of hundred feet from the terrible whirlpool that formed the middle of the lake.

At this sight, he rose upon his oars, plunged them in the water with redoubled energy, and sticking his feet against the sides of his boat, pulled with all his strength against the waves. This effort advanced him a few paces; he raised his oars again, to give another tug, and gain a second stroke; but during these few seconds, the boat went back about three times as much as he had gained before. Then he perceived the eddy which the whirlpool formed at some distance on the top of the water, and his frail vessel began to twist round into the waters, being attracted towards the centre. Father Barbel now felt that all his efforts must be useless. He abandoned his oars, and had no farther care but how to have recourse to the signal agreed upon with the Watersprite. He took up his torch of resin, and tried to light it. But the moment he opened the little wicket of his lantern to introduce it there

it shook so with the blowing of the wind, as almost to extinguish it. He quickly withdrew it, and closed the door of his lantern.

Meanwhile the circle in which the boat was turning, began to diminish more and more. At last, the unfortunate man could hear the waters roaring close by his side. As he drew nearer and nearer, the gulf seemed ready to devour him ; he tried a second time to open his lamp ; his right hand trembled, while his left endeavoured to protect the quivering flame. Suddenly the torch caught fire. Speedily he brandished it aloft in the air, and just as his bark sank, while dancing round the sides of the whirlpool, he shouted out loudly,

“ Water-sprites ! Water-sprites ! save — ”

He had not time to complete the sentence, for the water covered his voice, and the boat and the old fisherman disappeared together in the dark, whirling abyss.

VII.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE ABYSS.

FATHER BARBEL, rendered giddy by the noise of the water, and the twisting round of his boat, had fallen to the bottom of a grotto, where reigned complete darkness ; and, although he had gone right through all the depth of the lake, he was scarcely wet. When he had a little recovered from the fall, he tried, by touching, to reconnoitre the place in which he found himself. His feet and his knees met, every instant, some slippery surfaces, that rendered his walking difficult ; his hands, too, placed themselves upon viscous objects, which he felt to move as if they were living beings. A dull and continuous sound groaned above his head, and he seemed to hear all round him murmurs and a kind of smacking of lips.

“ Where am I ? ” cried he, stopping and rubbing his eyes.

Laughter sounded through the grotto ; and he felt a crowd of little bodies like rain about his head, the nature of which he could not divine, but which resembled animals leaping about him by millions. He halted, and tried to distinguish something across the darkness, for his eyes

were beginning to accustom themselves to the obscurity. He seemed to see beings of strange shapes ranged in a half circle; and, in the midst of them a living mass, that appeared to be throned on a rock. By degrees these objects became more distinct; and he was at last able to contemplate about twenty persons of extraordinary appearance, half men, half animals. The man in the middle was a kind of monster whose legs were stuck together, his body covered with little spots, and his head narrow and flat. His mouth, or rather his throat, was elongated like a beak.

Father Barbel recognised his mortal enemy the King of the Pikes. Soon, in fact, he could clearly distinguish the bleeding crown which he wore on his forehead, the insignia of his royalty. The others had all, like him, their legs joined together in one piece, in the shape of a tail; but each one could be distinguished by its head, which bore a semblance to the muzzle of a fish. By the side of the King was seated a woman, or something somewhat like one, whose royal garments were spotted with little red and blue stars, and whose head resembled the muzzle of a trout. In her Father Barbel recognised the one he had pursued right up to the Great Lake. This was the WITCH OF THE WATERS, commissioned to draw within the snares of the King of the Pikes, such impudent fishermen as that terrible monarch might have determined to make the victims of his vengeance.

"It's all over with me now," thought Father Barbel, at sight of his enemies. In fact, he saw the King make a sign to his subjects, as he pointed him out. These latter seized him with their fists; and, raising him in their arms, held him suspended over the head of the King, who, leaning back, shut his eyes with an air of beatitude, and opened his large gullet. Father Barbel threw a terrified glance down this abyss, bristling with teeth that formed in themselves a formidable saw, and he seemed to see right at the bottom of the entry of the living sea-tub, the head of a man; a portion of the royal dinner.

At this horrible sight, he shut his eyes, and tried to move himself, so as to get rid of the restraint of his

enemies. But these worthies held him firmly. They balanced him, for an instant, above the gullet of the King, and were just going to hurl him down it, when the Witch of the Waters rose suddenly and stopped them.

"No," said she; "a death such as that would be too gentle a punishment for his delinquencies. He has yet to purchase, by torments proportionate with his crimes, the honour of being devoured by our King, and of being entombed in his sacred bowels."

At these words, they laid Father Barbel down on the ground, while the King rose from his chair with an air of displeasure.

They all deliberated together, in a low voice, on the torments to which they were about to submit their victim. During this time the unfortunate man took a survey of the grotto through which a feeble light just shone. It was hung with mosses and stalactites: from the vault depended an immense lustre formed of icicles. The light which sparkled from the eyes of the King, played in these crystals, and was the only method of lighting this lustre, and the only light that pierced the shade of the subterranean den. Around him was posted a cordon of oysters, that passed their time in opening and shutting their shells alternately, a range of lazy mouths, gaping and yawning with sleepiness. Frogs, eels, leeches, strewed the ground in such profusion, that he could not walk a step without crushing some of them, and many other reptiles that Father Barbel had felt while walking in the Grotto.

The deliberation was soon over. First, all the weapons used by Father Barbel in fishing were successively brought out of the boat, and laid in the middle of the cavern. A great carp brought in the net; a young pike the casting-net; a whole regiment of crabs carried the eel-pot, and a little gudgeon the line. These were the executioners of criminals. When all were arranged, the assistants took their seats again; and the Pike, taking the end of a line, bound Father Barbel with it. They then placed before him a morsel of bread. The unhappy wretch had not eaten for twenty-four hours; and they knew his hunger being pressing, he would use every effort to dis-

embarrass himself of his covering, and clutch this meagre breakfast. At first Father Barbel took it all very easy, thinking he could soon break the light web of rushes. So he took his knife from his pocket, and cut those that were in front of him. Next he stretched out his arm to seize the morsel of bread; but it was stopped by another of the lines.

"I thought, however, I had cut them all," said he, to himself; "but one blow of the knife more." He passed his hand across the hole he had just made in the net. What was his astonishment to feel a new resistance, and to see new meshes filling up the void he had made. He remained motionless, for a moment, as he asked himself if he was not the sport of some dream; then he took out his knife again, and went to work. This time, however, he saw clearly the meshes become reproduced again, just in proportion as he destroyed them, and even become thicker as renewed. At sight of this useless labour, and this obstacle so slight, but always new, despair seized upon him, and he awaited he knew not what. Meanwhile, his hunger became more pressing, and the sight of the morsel of bread still further augmented his impatience and suffering. At last, not being able any longer to control himself, he got up, and behaved towards the net just as a water-rat in a trap; for, in a great rage, he tore with his hands and his teeth, whatever was in his way. He saw he had made a large hole, but there were still obstacles remaining. A little calmed, however, by seeing this result, he continued his exertions, with somewhat more method, for he thought he remarked that the meshes broken by his teeth were the only ones that did not grow again. In fact, the fishes not having any but this means of breaking their nets, it was the only one they had not guarded against.

As soon as Father Barbel did as they did, he, in a few minutes, found himself at liberty. He quickly seized the morsel of bread, and devoured it rapidly, while his judges made wry faces at seeing their secret discovered.

But a morsel of bread is but a poor dinner for a hungry fisherman, who has not had any breakfast. So he searched all about with his eyes for some other victuals, until, out

of a corner of the cave there came some eels, who set a table before him laden with delicious victuals. At sight of this feast, which, to a man in his situation, appeared even better than it was, Farther Barbel remained quiet and uncertain, dreading some new snares on the part of his enemies.

"It is not from any goodness of heart," said he to himself, "that they offer me this jolly good dinner: there is some trap in it. However, there is nothing very suspicious about the table that I can see. Would they poison the dishes? Faith, it is better to die of poison than of hunger."

All the while he was thus talking, he was sitting down to table and beginning to eat, but timidly, at first, and preserving a certain mistrust.

"Capital style of poison this, in any case;" said he, as he tasted one of the dishes, which had a most savoury odour.

Then he went on eating with greater confidence; and his hunger almost made him forget that he was in the midst of enemies. However, he soon began to think he saw them all laughing as they looked at him, and remarked that their laughter increased every time the trout pulled a cord that she held in her hand. He conceived the idea of watching where ended this cord, the least movement of which so delighted the assembly. Following the direction, his eye arrived at the summit of the vault, where he saw, with terror, his harpoon, suspended by a hair joined to the cord.

He jumped up, uttering a cry of terror, and leaving on one side the meal he had begun. As soon as he thought himself out of reach of the terrible weapon, he stopped and turned his eyes towards the vault; the harpoon was no longer there.

"Faith!" said he, believing they were going to let it fall; "it was high time for me to be off."

He was about to sit down to table again, when, turning round, he saw the harpoon, which, guided by the cord held by the malicious trout, was about to plunge itself into his back. He made a bound in advance, and sought refuge at

the other end of the cavern; but the harpoon was there quite as soon as he was. Afraid, and out of his senses, he set to work running and crying, while the harpoon pursued him like an avenger. He knew not where to conceal himself to avoid this new danger. Guided by his inquiet and blind course towards a corner of the grotto, he saw himself suddenly brought to a stop by an eel-pot, which obstructed the entry of a kind of passage, like those that are open for fish in canals. The harpoon was behind him, and left him no means of returning in the rear. The unfortunate man instinctively stooped, as he saw the trident of iron threatening his head, and found himself, thus, in the gullet of the creel. At the same moment, he felt the points of the trident touch his feet, made a desperate effort to avoid the contact, and caught his head in the narrow opening of the creel. The osier twigs closed and opened, but the harpoon still pressing on him from behind, he went forward in spite of himself, and ended by entering entirely within that osier prison, his hair in disorder, his face covered with scratches, and his body trussed up like that of a fowl.

Quickly, the laugh resounded all round him; while a carp, taking hold of the creel, shook it violently, as does a fisherman who wishes to make the fish fall out that are within it. These repeated shocks had the effect of making the unhappy prisoner descend towards the opposite opening, a narrow and long passage, where a child would be troubled to creep through. At last, his head came out, and the carp, placing the creel on its end, allowed those present a fine view of this mass of basket-work, surmounted with a human head, all bristling, which gave to Father Barbel the air of a great cheese maggot, without feet or arms. When the hilarity provoked by this spectacle had exhausted itself, they kept on shaking the poor fellow, until he came, at last, entirely out of his cage, and fell upon the earth, on which he rolled, quite beaten and exhausted.

"Faith!" cried Father Barbel, as soon as he rose up; "I never thought myself capable of making such a tour as that. It is a happy thing I am not too fat, I should never have squeezed out of there. It's all the same; if they

continue to squeeze me in that fashion, I shall end by becoming an eel, and shall pass through the neck of a bottle. Those gentlemen, there, have a style of amusement, that they can only have learnt from the imps below. After this, I shall not be surprised to find myself nearer than I like to a certain hot place ! Two or three more jokes like these, and it will be all over with you, my old friend, Barbel. But what more can they do with me ? Oh, the rascals ! " he went on, on seeing the casting-net and the line ; " I have two punishments yet to undergo."

In fact, it had been decreed to exhaust these different instruments of torture. The King of the Pikes gently opened the casting-net, then threw it, with all his force, over Father Barbel's head, who found himself caught and netted, nor more nor less than a fish. They then passed the cord of the casting-net through a hook fixed in the vaulted roof; and each taking hold of the rope, one after the other, drew it up and relaxed it alternately, so making the net go up and down by turns. He came down to the earth with more or less violence, according to the strength of the one who pulled at the cord, his repeated falls causing shouts of laughter in the assembly. The game was, who could pull the rope strongest, and make him fall from the greatest height. The trout imparted a shock so violent, that Father Barbel was almost stunned ; but when it came to the gudgeon's turn, he made vain efforts to raise such a mass, and, in shaking it impatiently, let go the cord, which rebounded suddenly, as of itself, to the vault.

The executioners saw with sorrow the net rise from the ground, as if drawn up on high by some invisible hand. Two or three frogs jumped up to catch it, and bring it down again ; but it still kept going up, going up, and soon disappeared through the vaulted roof, that opened to give it passage.

VIII.

DRY LAND AGAIN.

FATHER BARBEL was greatly astonished to find himself, on a sudden, stretched on the grass, on the border of the

Great Lake. By his side was the Watersprite, holding a handful of odoriferous herbs, with which he was vigorously rubbing his body.

"Ohr, it's you, my boy!" said he, as he recognized him. "Explain to me what all this means. It seems to me, as if for the last two or three days I had been asleep, and that I have passed the whole of that time, in dreaming some very disagreeable dreams. I have certainly seen some strange things, such as you can have no idea about, my lad."

"Just so, Father Barbel; only I know perfectly well what it is."

"Explain to me, then, at once, what all this means, since you are so knowing."

"The meaning is, Father Barbel, that you are an imprudent fellow. That instead of following my advice, you allowed yourself to be carried away by your passions; that you have been punished, and rightly so!"

"Hallo! how severe you are, my young master. If you had been in my place, you would not say so!"

"If I had been in your place, I should not have gone on to the Great Lake, and then I should not have had, what you are pleased to call, a bad dream."

"Come, don't be angry; but tell me a little of what this signifies, and how I must conduct myself for the future."

"So as to be safe, after not following my advice; is it not so, eh?"

"Decidedly; you are malicious, and will forgive me nothing. Let us see, whether it is because you preserve some rancour against me. Will you, also, range yourself on the side of my enemies? I suspect you of some interest down there; you wished to avenge yourself for not having been listened to."

"Yes; by taking you out of the jaws of the King of the Pikes; for you had a narrow escape, and, without me, you would have been, at this very moment—"

"Within the sacred bowels of his Majesty, as they said."

"Yes; most assuredly. You would have been already swallowed and digested."

"Faith, it makes me shudder. It seems, when I only think of it, as if I felt his teeth plunging into my body. What a throat the monster had ! A gulf, an abyss. But how did you manage, my friend, to get me out of it ?"

"I was watching for you. While they were making you undergo your punishments, I was hidden in the roof of the cavern, awaiting a favourable moment to liberate you, for I had heard your voice in the midst of the tempest. At last, when I saw the cord escape the gudgeon, I secured it, and drew up the casting-net. That's the way you were saved. But take care of yourself."

"Is it possible these villainous creatures would attempt anything more against me ?"

"Yes."

"In what manner then."

"All that they have made you suffer, and more yet. Moreover, their power over you has increased, while mine has diminished."

"You are frightening me, my boy."

"Attend well to what I say. All those weapons for fishing, which have served for your punishment, are for the future forbidden to you. If you use a net you will find yourself caught within it as you have been already. If you make use of your harpoon, your harpoon will leap back upon you ; so will the other things. One only is permissible, that which they had not time to use against you—the line. You can fish with the line, then, but not otherwise. Moreover, it is forbidden you to catch a pike ; as soon as you see one come under your line—draw up the line. I give you notice that they will tempt you often. Their king will send his subjects round you even at the risk of some of them perishing. It will always be easy for you to recognise them, even though you cannot see them. Every time a pike nibbles at your bait, you will see the float of your line dance on the water, and make somersaults, and plunges, just like a duck when it is fishing. Whereupon, be careful not to make a movement; let your line go quickly ; and remain there until the next day. The pike will have been caught on your hook, and will die : so much the worse for him ; as for you, you have

nothing to fear, for you will not have pulled him out of the water."

" Hallo!" said the old fisherman, " this is a bad look out, indeed! How shall I make out my living in such a manner? What! not set an eel-creel? or throw one cast of my net?"

" It cannot be done."

" But that's no kind of life at all."

" It is your own fault."

" Faith, that piece of stupidity has cost me rather dear."

" It is always so. Our faults cost us much more than the effort we must make to avoid them."

" You speak golden words, my lad; but, nevertheless, it is very hard."

" Come, be comforted, Father Barbel. You are growing old. A casting-net is too heavy for your hand; fishing by line is what better suits your age; it is your retirement that you are now undertaking."

" I am much obliged to you, my good lad, for your advice; and I will profit by it. I will keep to the line, since it must be so."

" But look well after yourself; your enemies will take advantage of the least negligence."

" Be at ease, I won't allow them to get hold of me again."

" In any case, remember our signal."

" Very well. But this is not all; I have to get back to my cabin, if it still exist, for now a days I really don't know what to expect."

Be at rest on that score; you will find your cottage in the same state as you left it. The only thing is, we must get there by swimming."

" Hallo! Why, it is more than three miles from here?"

" So much the worse."

" So much the worse! that's very easy to say; but I don't think I could ever swim as far as that. I am old, as you say, and since, besides, those monsters there have tortured me until I can scarcely move my limbs. However, I can't remain here all my life."

"We will both swim in the same direction, and will embark together."

"Let us try then; but I have not much of a chance, if I don't get a rest on the road."

"Don't be afraid, I will help you; although I am so much older than you."

"You have always something to make me laugh. I like that; it makes me young again. Decidedly you are my Good Genius; with you, I fear nothing, not even in the middle of the water."

At these words, both of them plunged into the Great Lake, and directed themselves, as they swam towards the canal that led to the river.

Father Barbel, at first, bore the fatigue of his maritime voyage tolerably well; but soon he complained of the cramp, which took him in the right foot.

"It's the one that suffered so much pain in going into that creel. Those rascals of fishes; they have jolly well paid me out for the war I have so long waged against them."

He kept on, however, although with difficulty. At last, feeling his strength becoming exhausted, he called to his companion, who was swimming in front with admirable ease.

"Dear Watersprite," said he, "if you do not come to help me, I must stop here. But I am thinking what you can do? You can't take me on your back?"

"All right," replied the Watersprite, "I shall find a good plan for relieving you; I have got you out of a much worse scrape."

"That's true; come, I trust myself in your hands entirely. Do just what you like with me."

Rapidly, the Watersprite, all the while with his body suspended in the water, gathered a bundle of reeds, which he bound with a stem of the water-lily.

"Support yourself on the top of this," said he, to his companion, "and remain without moving."

"It is time," said Father Barbel, seizing the bundle, which he placed under his arms, and which supported him on the top of the water.

The Watersprite tied round his own body the other end

of the lily-stem, fixed on the bundle of reeds, and set to work swimming, and dragging along with him the bundle of reeds and Father Barbel.

The latter, without moving, and having nothing to do, but lean on his bundle of reeds, had plenty of time to contemplate his young companion.

The child swam with wondrous agility, and his convoy did not hinder his sporting in the water, just like some bather, who is there only to enjoy himself. Sometimes he would halt, leave the bundle of reeds to float past him down the stream; then suddenly dive in, and Father Barbel would soon see him re-appear at ten yards from him. At other times, he would lightly shake his little green cable, and set the bundle of reeds rocking.

"Take care!" Father Barbel would say, "you will upset my flotilla; I have not got good sea-legs; and I don't feel myself at all too firmly seated."

"Don't be frightened," said the little Watersprite, laughing; "there's no cause for fear."

"You are always confident; but I have all the feeling, just now, of one who is learning to ride on a horse that has not been taught; if you set my horse a rearing, I shall not be able to keep on him, that is certain."

This bye-play seemed to enliven the voyage, which otherwise would have been tolerably wearisome for the old fisherman. For the rest, he could not but admire the skill and address of his companion.

"How he swims!" he kept on saying; "what a swimmer he is. By-the-by, you have forgotten to teach me your stroke; what a famous stroke!"

"Here's just the occasion; you have now the time for studying. Now, then, watch me well."

Then the Watersprite, stooping his head a little under the surface of the water, stuck his left arm along his body, then striking out rapidly with his right, clove the waters like an arrow. He ran through, in this way, nearly half a mile, to the great astonishment of Father Barbel, who gazed on him with amazed eyes.

"It is not more difficult than the other way," said the Watersprite, suddenly raising his head.

"Not more difficult!" replied Father Barbel, "you are a funny fellow! How do you think I could stop a quarter of an hour under water, like you?"

"Perhaps that might trouble you, Father Barbel."

"That's a clever discovery of yours. Teach me to breathe under water, or else——"

"Ah! as regards that, it's another question; I can't teach you anything down there?"

"Then I can't learn your stroke, and that's a pity."

"You'll never want it; you will always be a-head of me."

"When a man passes his life on the water, as I do, he always wants such knowledge."

"What; for fishing with a line?"

"Ah! you bring back my cares. To fish with a line! It's very well, from time to time, in fine spring days, under a bright sunshine; but at night, what can I do then?"

"You will sleep, Father Barbel; that will be all the better for you."

"Such is the fact. Perhaps you are in the right; but it's plain, I begin to be tired of it at the very beginning. When I think—But here we are, arrived at home. I see my little islet. Oh, I feel my strength return! I must swim to it; it is no distance to speak of."

So he left his bundle of reeds, and started off for a swim, with a joyful ardour, that made him, for the instant, forgetful of his fatigue. In a few yards, he touched the banks of his islet, though he had some trouble in getting on to it.

"Eh, eh!" said he, as soon he was on shore; "I am before you, my lad; Father Barbel has some vigour in his old limbs yet. Well, here we are? But where can he be?" added he, as he looked in vain over and on, and up and down the river, for the Watersprite.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked again, all round, and up and down—the Watersprite had vanished.

"What a funny little chap!" said Father Barbel, with his eye still fixed on the river. "What did I call him? a young chap? He is much older than me; he might be my father, or my grandfather. What strange things I have seen within the last few days!"

IX.

DANGER OF FISHING WITH A LINE.

FATHER BARBEL was as pleased as a child on re-entering his cabin, which, he had thought, at one moment, he should never see again. He visited his store-pond, distributed crumbs of bread among his fish, as a father to his children; and called his ducks, who ran, flapping their wings, and sprang familiarly on his shoulders, while his fowls pecked from his hand the morsel, that he tried maliciously to snatch from their greediness.

"Yes, yes; it's me;" he said to them. "It's your old master, it's your papa, come back to you! Ah, my children! you have had a narrow escape of not seeing me again. He has had a narrow escape, has Father Barbel; I will tell you all about this some other time. Meanwhile, feast away, my little ones. Well, now; why are you looking so hard at me, my big duck? Why don't you eat? Oh, very well, I understand you; you find the bread a little hard. What would you have? It is now three days that I have been absent, but that is not my fault. But attend, my children; I am going to give you a soaking in the water, and to make you a good sop."

Half an hour passed in these recreations, and in this review of the guests of the island; half an hour of happiness, that made Father Barbel a real king, returning in triumph to his capital, encircled by the love of his people. It is quite true, that this king waited on his own subjects, like a servant, which is scarcely according to the habits of sovereigns. But, like a good prince, he had no haughtiness, nor even self-love, a circumstance that did not fail to add to his happiness.

After a moment of full enjoyment, he re-entered within his cabin. But there his joy vanished at once. He saw there his nets, his casting-gear, his eel-creels, all his fishing instruments; tools for work and weapons of triumph, that had become to him indispensable articles of furniture, and almost as companions. For the first time, perhaps, in his life, the tears came into his eyes, as he thought he must renounce all these, quit his friends, and give up, so

to say, his past life. He took them up, one after the other, examined them, and tried them carefully. Having remarked a fracture in his net, he could not avoid mending it, although thenceforth it was of no more use to him. He finished, by hanging up all these tools on the walls of his cabin, like an old soldier who, on returning home, arranges as a trophy arms now useless, and spoils won from the enemy.

"Come, rest thou there," said he, as he hung his trident on a nail; "moulder there, die there, my old companion; it must be done! And thou, my jolly eel-pot, thou whom I have woven with so much care, thou who hadst an air so coquettish in the clear and running water, with the grass and moss surrounding thee; thou who sat'st enthroned like a queen in the middle of the river; here must thou now remain, dry, empty, weary! For wearied thou soon must be; far from the freshness of the waters, the golden sand and the humid rushes; no more wilt thou see the green reeds bending over thee their caressing heads; no longer hear the gurgling of the gentle streams, nor feel again the imprisoned gudgeon leaping against thy sides. We must now renounce our pleasures; my friends, we have all of us grown old. It is you, especially, who are the cause of all this," said he, turning to his casting-net; "but, go! I desire you no longer. You have given me many pleasures, you have made me happy nights, and I shall not forget them. I have a large heart!" added he, as he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "It is right that I should have."

He took his line, and went and placed himself on the banks of the river, where he remained until evening, but brought home only a few fish. The next and following days passed in the same manner. His life became monotonous, and weariness consumed him by degrees. At night, he slept not; but would often get up and walk silently along the river, slowly following its winding banks. When the moon shone upon the waters, he stooped down to see the fishes playing together; but the sight of them only the more saddened him.

"How happy they are, down there!" he would say to

himself, as he contemplated them as a miser his treasure. "How tranquilly they play under my very eyes! They seem as if they know they have nothing more to fear from the poor old fisherman. Truly, they make me envy them; I should like to live and swim with them!"

During one year, he spent every day of his life, seated on the banks of the river, line in hand, waiting the fish, that would scarcely nibble at his bait. True it is, he did not seem to trouble himself much about that. In spring, he would cast his line carelessly in the water, and sleep, while the eager gudgeons ate the insects badly fastened on to his hook. The pikes would profit by this carelessness, to try and surprise him, and had it not been for the vigilance of the Watersprite, who hardly ever left his protégé, he would soon have become the victim of the Bleeding Crown.

"After all," he would sometimes say, "when the reckoning's made up, what does it matter if a man die one way or the other. It is not much of a life, this, always fishing with a line, always and always. Besides, I have grown old, I am tired of myself—I begin to wish I was at the bottom of the water."

One day, while he was asleep, according to his usual custom, with his line in his hand, a number of pikes were looking out for this moment. One of them darted suddenly upon the hook, swallowed it whole, and in struggling to get off, woke Father Barbel. This latter, feeling that a fish was caught, made an effort to draw the line out of the water; but the pike gave it such a violent shock, as to make him fall in the river. The old fisherman comprehended his danger at once, but he was too late. He tried to swim, but his rheumatic limbs moved with difficulty. Feeling he could not save himself, he called his friend.

"Watersprite! Watersprite!" he cried. "Save the old fisherman!"

The Watersprite ran up at his voice.

"I can no longer save you completely," said he; "but I can mitigate your punishment. You shall live, but you are condemned to live here!"

Father Barbel was desirous to answer him, but his



mouth, already lengthened into a muzzle, could not articulate a word. His legs stuck together in one piece, and his feet, twisted back, formed the extremity of the tail of a fish. His arms grew thinner by degrees, and then becoming wider, formed fins. His long white beard separated itself on each side of his mouth, in two kinds of fleshy tresses, and, finally, all his body became that of a fish. This fish has preserved his name, and still bears on each side of his mouth, two little beards, or *barbillons*, that recall the face of FATHER BARBEL.

ULF THE MINSTREL.

I.

THE BEGINNING.

ONCE upon a time—long, long before they had killed the best of the Giants, and shut up the inferior ones in travelling caravans, to be shown at a penny apiece; and when the poor Fairies had plenty of employment all the year round, instead of being only wanted for a few nights at Christmas, to play in the pantomimes—there lived, in a country so far off that ancient writers affirm it had been found necessary to build a high wall at one end of it to keep folks from tumbling over the edge of the world—but this I should be disposed to consider an exaggeration)—a great King, who was very old, very rich, very powerful, and very brave; who had fleets, and armies, and privy councillors, and silver-mounted meerschaum pipes, and diamond breast-pins, and tax-gatherers, and Gold Shaving-Pots-in-Waiting, and slopes in front of his parlour window, and every luxury on the face of the earth. There was only one drawback to his greatness and prosperity—he was very stupid.

It would be unnecessary to inform my readers that this great monarch had a beautiful daughter—seeing that all wealthy, powerful, and stupid kings, of that period, notoriously had beautiful daughters; and I would not mention

so self-evident a circumstance, only that, as the beautiful daughter in question, is to be the heroine of my story, I don't see how I can very well get along without some slight recognition of her existence. So, perhaps, my best plan will be to tell the reader all about her.

Her name was Diamonduckz. She was just turned of fifteen. Her hair was the colour of calve's-foot jelly. Her eyes were as turquoise sleeve-buttons. Her cheek was like a china plate with a rose painted in the middle : when I say her cheek, it must be understood that she had two, and that they were both alike. I have long been in search of an original comparison for her lips, and have decided on informing you that they resembled ripe cherries. I cannot say that her teeth were like pearls, for pearls are round —and teeth of that peculiar formation, I should say, would be considered a deformity, while the teeth of Diamonduckz were of precisely the shape that teeth ought to be. However, they were of a beautiful transparent white, and remarkable for their regularity.

And now, I hope, the Princess Diamonduckz stands vividly before you, arrayed in all her charms.

Of course, all the Princes and Noblemen within a few thousand miles of the kingdom were in love with her, from the mere report of her beauty. Equally, as a matter of course, they all assembled, on a given day, at her father's Court, as rival candidates for her hand, according to the custom of the period.

There were a hundred and twenty-three of them altogether. The Lord Chancellor (who was a miracle of wisdom, as will be seen), pronounced this a lucky number. Perhaps he meant it was lucky there were no more of them.

A messenger was despatched to the Princess's bower (for they didn't call it a nursery in those days), to inform her Royal Highness that the Princes were assembled, and that she had better look sharp to come and choose a husband from among them. You see there were a good many specimens to be looked at, and the Court didn't want to be kept waiting there all night.

The Princes ranged themselves in a single file—a good

long file you may be assured—and proceeded to set themselves off to the best advantage. Those who had good legs put their best legs foremost. Those who squinted presented their profiles. Those who had humpbacks stood facing the spectator. Those who had red noses were, for the most part, provided with costly embroidered handkerchiefs. Those who had forgotten to wash their hands, kept them in their pockets.



Gold-Stick in Waiting—or some other great stick of the Court—announced the arrival of the Princess Diamonduckz, which announcement was followed by a flourish of trumpets. What earthly occasion there was for flourishing a parcel of trumpets, I can't imagine; but, flourished they were. The Princess entered, attended by her ladies in waiting, and by her faithful old nurse, who wasn't a

lady at all. It was the excellent creature's boast and pride, that she was nothing of the kind; but quite the contrary.

A hundred and twenty-three princely heads were immediately ducked in profound obeisance. The Princes with the good legs bowed lowest, as it gave them an opportunity of thrusting out their best legs further than ever. The gentlemen in the humps bowed as little as possible, so that the Princess might not look over their shoulders. Those with the dirty hands got the matter over as quickly as they could manage it, and put their hands back again.

"Now, my dear," said the King, who was a monarch of the Cole species, and abruptly jovial in his manner, "there they are, of all sorts and sizes: you have only to pick and choose; and please be quick about it, for you've been a dreadfully long time dressing, and we want our dinner."

"We await Her Royal Highness's orders," said a hundred and twenty-three voices, in chorus.

"Am I sure that my orders will be obeyed?" the Princess inquired.

A hundred and twenty-three hands were laid upon the places where a hundred and twenty-three hearts were supposed to be; and the bowing was repeated.

"We have sworn to abide by your Royal Highness's decision."

"You have?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, my Royal Highness's decision is, that the whole lot of you be sent packing about your business."

This time the hundred and twenty-three hands were clapped to a hundred and twenty-three sword-hilts.

"How now, gentlemen!" said the old King, rising in great trepidation, "What is the matter?"

"We have been insulted," said the chorus, angrily.

"By whom?"

"By the Princess."

"But you surely don't want to fight her—a hundred and twenty-three of you?"

There was something so unutterably stupid about this

speech that the outraged suitors were fain to sheath their swords—in sheer contempt for the speaker.

"There! there! that's right; let us try and smooth



this difficulty. We are a peaceful monarch, as you all know. Daughter, you have been too hasty; nor can we approve of the unlady-like expression you made use of.

I'm afraid it's that vulgar old woman who teaches you such things. My Lord High Chancellor, advise us!"

His Lord High Chancellor respectfully declined doing anything of the sort. That officer was far too wise a man to give his advice when it was really wanted; by adherence to which sagacious rule he managed to keep up the market-value of the commodity in question. He bowed meekly, and said, it was a question beyond his poor capacity, and one requiring the superior wisdom of the Royal intellect.

"Very good! very proper!" said the King, highly satisfied. "You alone of all our advisers never fail us in an emergency. We thank you for your counsel, and will act upon it. But,—um!—ha! We really don't know what to say. Ahem! Daughter! what possible objection can you have to marrying all those gentlemen? No! I don't mean that—but you can't object to them all, you know. You understand our meaning. There are some very fine-looking fellows amongst them. Yonder cavalier in the red hair, for instance. He's the Crown Prince of Golconda. My honoured friend, his father, I am happy to say, is ailing; and, in a month or so, he will be the King of Diamonds."

"Take him!" whispered Bimbo, the Court jester. "He's soon to turn up a trump card."

The King scored Bimbo across the costard with his golden sceptre, and (when Bimbo had done howling) resumed—

"Come, daughter; what say you to the Prince of Golconda?"

"That I wouldn't have him at a gift, if he were hung all over with Koh-i-Noors."

"Well, there is as good fish in the sea—but, you know the proverb. Talking of the sea, this is my young friend the Prince of Whales and Finland. He smells rather strong of oil, perhaps; but his father's kingdom is rich in fisheries."

"Don't have him," said Bimbo, nudging the Princess's elbow; "he's sure to prove a scaly fellow."

"My Lord Chancellor, kick Bimbo down the steps of

the throne for me! Thank you! Well, daughter, how about the Prince of Whales and Finland?"

"I wouldn't touch him with a toasting-fork," answered the Princess, with a shudder.

"Hum! Really, this is most trying. Perhaps he is not outlandish enough for your tastes. Well! here is the King of the Antarctic Regions —."

"He's an-*ice* man for a small wedding breakfast party," suggested Bimbo.

"Let Bimbo be carried out to the Court-yard, and privately whipped. Nine dozen, if you please, my Lord. Gentlemen, pardon this trivial interruption. Come! His Antarctic Majesty is worth thinking about. He has been attracted from a great distance by the report of your charms; this ought to flatter any young lady. Moreover, he assures me that he is master of a kingdom of boundless wealth in those remote parts; and, of course, I have no means of disputing his word. What do you say to the South Pole?"

"That I would see him and his remote kingdoms still farther first."

"Then, in that case, I'm afraid it is a hopeless business; and I am getting confoundedly hungry. Gentlemen, I wish you all a very good morning."

The suitors looked aghast from one to another at this abrupt dismissal. At length, the Prince of Golconda, constituting himself spokesman of the party, inquired—

"But our promised entertainment?"

"Well, really, as you came here on the understanding that I was to find a son-in-law amongst you, and as you have not fulfilled that condition, I don't see that the contract holds good. My servants will direct you to the best inns in the neighbourhood. No thanks, I entreat. Dish the dinner. My dear, your arm!"

And the Court broke up.

II.

TREATS OF OPTWIG, AND OTHER MATTERS.

Now, the Lord Chancellor had a wife, and that wife had presented him with a son, of whom both parents were

remarkably proud. It might have been difficult to understand why, had the youth been endowed with mere ordinary personal attractions, mental or physical; but as he was next-door to an idiot, about two feet under the middle height, wall-eyed, bandy-legged, flat-nosed, splay-footed, and unamiable, it is no wonder they thought him a paragon of beauty and excellence.



This young gentleman, who was called the Count Optwig, was about twenty years of age. As his mother was her son's slave, and as the Lord Chancellor was his wife's slave, and as the King was his Chancellor's, it is no great stretch of history to state that Count Optwig, at the particular period we treat of, was the most powerful person in the kingdom.

Count Optwig was not such a fool but that he had sufficient taste to fall in love with the Princess Diamonducks

as well as his betters. He had done so, and resolved to marry her.

He exerted no very complicated system of diplomacy to bring about the object of his ambition. He simply cried, and told his mother; who simply rated and threatened her husband; who simply watched and wheedled the King.

The young Count had not presented himself among the noble candidates in the morning—it not entering into his parents' plans that he should do so. He had been kept at home to follow his favourite pastimes of playing at marbles and singeing the calves of the men-servants with burnt bits of firewood.

As has been seen, the Lord Chancellor had not interfered in the proceedings of the morning (beyond the kicking of Bimbo, which was a mere court formality). As he saw things take exactly the turn he could have wished, he thought it as well to let them alone for the present.



The royal dinner party consisted, on that day, exclusively of the King and the Lord Chancellor. His Majesty, being fatigued by his morning's exertions, required at once privacy and some one to grumble at. The Lord Chancellor, who had a knack of making himself nobody, and would submit to any amount of personal ill-treatment, was naturally the guest fixed upon.

When the band had finished playing on the slopes,—when the cloth had been withdrawn, and the royal footman had privately informed his friend the court newsman (who was faithfully at his post among the dusters under the back staircase) what His Majesty had had for dinner, the King graciously pushed the decanters towards his confidential adviser, and requested that statesman not to sit there like a fool, but to say something.

The Lord Chancellor meekly replied that he had nothing to say, as usual; that he could only speak, at any time, when his poor brains had been stirred up by words of wisdom emanating from the royal lips.

"Um! yes, of course," grumbled the King (nor looking very much displeased, by-the-bye); "We must do everything; all the talking and all the thinking of the empire devolves upon our shoulders."

"Whose so fit?" said the Lord Chancellor, not caring to point out the looseness of His Majesty's rhetoric, seeing that shoulders do not think or speak.

"Um! Ha! Well, you do your best—I will do you that justice. But, of course, all men are not, equally gifted. We will think of something to say by and by. Pass the anchovies."

"Behold them, your Majesty! But why a moment's delay? Unless, indeed, you would punish your poor servant for his incapacity by keeping him in suspense. But I am so unworthy as to be debarred from hearing your Majesty's already-formed opinion on the subject nearest your royal heart? Of course, I allude to the apparently unaccountable behaviour of the Princess this morning. For unaccountable it is to me, until such time as your Majesty shall be pleased to impart the explanation, which (forgive the expression) I see trembling for utterance on the royal lips."

"Just so. We were about to say something on that head."

"A thousand thanks. I am a happy man again. Your Majesty was about to say that there is only one possible explanation for the strange conduct of your illustrious daughter. I am on thorns till I hear it."

"Of course there can be only one—which is, as you, I mean I, was about to say, is—Pass the Olives."

"Behold them, great King! There's a fine fat one. May I fill the royal glass? The honour deprives me almost of the power of listening. But I trust I can recollect who it is that is addressing me. Your Majesty was about to say—(might your slave recommend a devilled biscuit?)—but if your royal daughter should so far have forgotten herself (pardon the expression) as to disobey your Majesty, when commanded to select a husband from the very élite of noble blood and chivalry—there must be a reason for it."

"Go on—you understand me. I am—I was about to say, there must be a reason, which is—"

"As you very justly remark, sire, which is—that she must have fallen in love with somebody else."

"Come, I say, Chancellor, no impudence."

"I accept the rebuke. Your Majesty fears I have misconstrued the royal words. Heaven forbid that I should deem one of your illustrious blood capable of forming an attachment derogatory to her birth and station."

"Well, I should hope not."

"Therefore, if, as your Majesty shrewdly surmises, the Princess Diamondduckz has really bestowed her affections, you would say that it must necessarily be upon a gentleman qualified, by his rank and merits, to deserve so vast an honour."

"Of course; of course."

"From these surmises your Majesty will rapidly draw the inference, that, as the Princess has been brought up in the strictest seclusion, with no other male companion of gentle blood, and of her own, save my unworthy son, the Count Optwig—"

The King jumped up in a violent passion, and kicked the Lord Chancellor all round the room.

"Gentle blood! Get out, you villain! Your father was a sheep-stealer, and your wife a fishfag. I picked you both out of the gutter. I see what you're driving at."

"I resign my portfolio with pleasure," said the minister,

rubbing himself with much dignity, "regretting that I did not continue in office long enough to conclude the negotiations with the Bactrian merchants, for the loan to enable your Majesty to carry on the war against their sovereign."

"There, I didn't mean to be uncivil. Sit down; and let us talk it over."

"Your Majesty forgets that I have been insulted—outraged!"

"Well; I am sure I beg your pardon. Pray forgive me. Send for the boy and girl, and we'll have them married this very afternoon. Don't go, there's a good fellow."

"May the heavens send your Majesty a more faithful servant!"

The Lord Chancellor bowed, and was about to withdraw.

"O Lord, what shall I do without him! Sirrah, I command thee, as a faithful subject!"

"That command makes me powerless. Let private considerations give way. Be it as your Majesty wishes. What, ho! without!"

A Lord in Waiting appeared, wiping his lips.

"The King desires the presence of the Princess; also, of His Excellency, my son, the Count Optwig."

The Lord Chancellor added, in a rapid whisper, while the King was refilling his glass, "Tell his lady mother to wash him carefully, particularly behind the ears, and to take off his pinafore. Also, bid Father Cockowax, the chaplain, to be in attendance."

The Lord in Waiting stole a slice of pound-cake unobserved from the sideboard, and departed on his errand.

III.

VERY DRAMATIC INDEED.

FATHER COCKOWAX came first. He had been kept waiting outside (by the Chancellor's orders), in readiness, since the commencement of the dinner. The Princess was the next of the summoned to make her appearance. Master Optwig occasioned some delay, first, by insisting on finish-

ing a game at ring-taw with the stable-boy, and, secondly, by refusing to have any liberties taken with his brown holland.

"Well, Papa, what is it?" asked the Princess pettishly. "It's very hard a girl can't have four hours to herself, to do up her back hair."

"Daughter," said the King, "no nonsense! We have sent for you to be, in fact——. Explain, Chancellor."

"His Majesty would say—married!"

"Not if I know it," said her Royal Highness, decisively.

"How now, jade!"

"His Majesty would say, that further concealment on your Royal Highness's part is useless. With his usual clearness of perception, he has discovered the secret cause of your Royal Highness's contemptuous rejection of the Princes this morning."

Diamondduckz bit her lips, and pulled a rose to pieces.

"It is impossible to conceal from a man—I beg pardon—a monarch, of His Majesty's wisdom, the fact that you have formed an attachment to a gentleman about the Court."

The Princess threw the stem of her rose on the floor, and, folding her beautiful arms, said, defiantly,—

"Well! if I have, I have. So now it's out, and that's all about it."

"Your Majesty was right," said the Chancellor, appealing to his Sovereign.

"And what are you going to do with me now you know it?" asked the Princess, who took after her late mother—a woman of decided spirit.

"Be not alarmed, your Royal Highness! Your august sire is the best of fathers, as, indeed, of every thing else. He but consulted your happiness in calling together the most august Princes of Christendom, and even a few of heathenesse, in order that you might be provided with a husband of your liking. He is actuated by similar motives now that he finds you have already made your selection. Father Cockowax is in attendance expressly to unite you to the husband of your choice."

"Is it possible?" The Princess clapped her hands and leaped on her father's lap, cuddling him violently. "O, you dear, good Papa! Who would have thought it!"

Then she leapt off her father's lap, and threw her arms round the neck of Father Cockowax, much to the discomfiture of that prelate, saying, "O, you dear Father Cockowax, how I do love you!"



She released Father Cockowax, and was about to repeat the experiment on the Lord Chancellor. This, however, was more than she could manage.

"Well, I daresay I shall learn even to kiss *you* some day. But where is my dear darling——?"

"He is here," said the Chancellor, as the hangings were raised, and the young Count Optwig entered the apartment, in charge of his illustrious mother. His Lordship was blubbering dreadfully.

"Behold him! He is unable to repress tears of joy at his unexpected happiness. But there—bless you, my children—be happy!"

The Princess, who had stood aghast in silence for some seconds, burst out into a piercing shriek.

"He!" she screamed, in a voice of mingled horror and

indignation (the tones of which strongly reminded the King of his dear departed Queen); "I would sooner marry the King of Diamonds, the Prince of Whales, the South Pole, and the other hundred and twenty altogether, than look at the little monster."

"Incredible!" said the Lord Chancellor.

"Impossible!" said the Chancellor's wife.

"Take him away!" shrieked the Princess, hiding her face with her hands; "the little, ugly, dirty monster!"

"Hey-day!" said the King, who, what with the wine and the unexpected events of the last few minutes, was somewhat confused; "I don't understand all this. He is very ugly, to be sure; and I couldn't imagine how on earth—. But perhaps" (a sudden light burst upon His Majesty's clouded intellect)—"perhaps you didn't mean him?"

"No! no! no!" said the Princess, violently. "NO!"

"Then whom did you mean?"

"Mean! Why, ULF THE MINSTREL, of course."

His Majesty started up, with a terrible expression of countenance, and rang the bell.

"Send me up Ulf the Minstrel, with a clean sword, and executioners for one," he ordered, in his sternest voice.

IV.

ULF THE MINSTREL.

ULF the Minstrel was brought in pinioned. To the great discomfiture of the King, he didn't look in the least degree frightened. So the King felt immediately frightened of him.

"Of course your Majesty will proceed to immediate execution?" said the Lord Chancellor, white with rage.

"Well, I don't know," said the King, whose anger had somewhat abated. "Hadn't we better hear what he has to say for himself?"

"I should decidedly advise not," said the Chancellor.

"Cut off his head!" shrieked the Chancellor's lady.

"You'd better not," said Ulf the Minstrel, quietly.

"How now, villain! Dost thou threaten?"

"Most decidedly."

"Dost thou not know, that it is in my power to have
thee torn to pieces by wild horses?"
"I know very well that it isn't!"



"Are you going to stand there and hear your King insulted?" asked the Chancellor's lady, pinching her husband savagely.

"Off with his head!" said the Chancellor to the Executioner.

"If he tries it on," said Ulf the Minstrel, "I'll spit in the corner of his left eye; or, still worse, I'll sneeze at him, and then his own mother wouldn't know him."

"Mercy!" implored the Executioner, falling upon his knees.

Now, this Ulf the Minstrel, it should be stated, was a very mysterious, and rather terrible personage. Nobody knew anything about him, and he, in return, appeared to know everything about everybody. He had come to the Court some months back from nobody knew whence, on nobody knew what business. He appeared to have travelled all over the world. He could cure diseases by the most simple herbs of the forest, when the incantations of the wisest magicians had failed to charm away the evil. He had a curious little needle, in a glass case, that always pointed to the north. He could foretell eclipses of the sun and moon. He was clearly not a person to be trifled with.

"Your Majesty, of course, sees the state of affairs," said the Chancellor. "He has bewitched the Princess."

"He hasn't," sobbed the Princess.

"Oh! how can you say so, Diamonduckz," said Ulf reproachfully; "you know I have, for you told me so this morning."

"You hear, your Majesty, the wizard confesses."

"Well, if being better and handsomer, and cleverer than anybody else, and loving me very much indeed, is witchcraft, then he has bewitched me," said poor little Diamonduckz.

"The case couldn't be clearer, your Majesty," said the Chancellor.

"Of course he will be burnt alive," said the Chancellor's lady, "as is customary in such cases."

"I am sure I don't know how to act for the best," said the King, who had some doubts in his own mind, whether so formidable a person as the prisoner might not be worth conciliating.

"Your Royal duty is as clear as noon-day," said the

Chancellor. "He has brought dishonour upon your Royal house, and must die."

"By the slowest imaginable torture," said the Chancellor's lady.

"Well, I suppose there's something in that," said the King. "Prisoner, I presume you have no objection."

"Not in the least," said Ulf the Minstrel; "that is to say, on my own account. Only, if you kill me, I warn you, there'll be none of you left alive within ten minutes after my death."



The august assemblage looked rather uncomfortable at this threat.

"I'm sure I don't know what to do with him," said the King, decidedly nonplussed.

"Allow me to advise your Majesty," said Ulf. "Set me at liberty, and give me your daughter in marriage. If you don't you'll be sorry for it."

"Insolent wretch!" said the Lord Chancellor.

"Cut him to pieces, fellow," screamed the Chancellor's lady to the Executioner, "or I'll have thee boiled in oil."

The poor headsman (who dared rather disobey the King himself than the Chancellor's lady) raised his two-handed sword, and made a movement towards Ulf the Minstrel. Ulf the Minstrel leapt up in the air, and made a face at him. The Executioner dropped his sword, and fell prostrate on the dining-room floor.

"I'll spare thee this time, fellow," said Ulf, "in consideration of thine obedience to orders; only don't attempt it again. Now, your Majesty, what is to be my doom? I am rather tired of waiting."

"Um! Really this is a difficult business. Lord Chancellor, advise us."

"After all," said the Chancellor, somewhat chap-fallen, "mercy is the brightest jewel in the Royal Crown. There can be no harm in sentencing the knave to perpetual banishment. It is, perhaps, but just to spare his life, that he may have time to repent of his sins."

"Just so. Banishment it is. Minstrel, the sooner you get out of this the better," said the King decisively.

"Think twice," suggested Ulf the Minstrel.

"Upon our Royal soul, thou art the most insolent varlet the world has ever produced. Why should we think twice?"

"Because a second thought may convince your Majesty that the kingdom cannot possibly get on without me."

"Upon my word!" said the Chancellor.

"I really never!" said the Chancellor's lady.

"Because," continued Ulf, "you will no sooner have got rid of me, than you will wish me back again."

"Impudent and most conceited villain!"

"I wish I may never move from this place, if in all my born days—"

"Because, with my departure, all good luck will depart from your realm with me. Because, greater powers than your own, who watch over me, will immediately revenge my ill-treatment, by the infliction of a national calamity, which neither your own empty numskull, nor that of your hen-pecked First Rogue in Waiting there, will know how to turn aside."

"Do you want me—I mean us—to kick you down stairs?"

"Do, your Majesty; and kick hard, if you please," the Chancellor advised.

"Pray allow me to tear his eyes out first?" the Chancellor's lady entreated.

"Don't trouble yourselves," said Ulf. "I will not stay to be kicked by a man I hope one day to call father. I'm



off! I wish your Majesty more brains. Your Ladyship, I wish you no greater harm than that you may be condemned to look in the glass for an hour each day. Diamonduckz, my love, *au revoir*."

Ulf the Minstrel was gone, and could not be found anywhere.

"At any rate, I'll have somebody to kick down stairs," said the King, whose blood was thoroughly up.

Master Optwig happened to be nearest the door, as he

was also the lightest weight in the room ; so the King kicked Master Optwig down stairs.

The Chancellor and his lady rushed shrieking after their darling.

“A good riddance !” said his Majesty, slamming the door after them.

“Has the King any further commands for his poor servant ?” inquired Father Cockowax, who had stood trembling in a corner during the late scene.

“Yes : go to the devil !”

Father Cockowax withdrew from the King’s presence abruptly.

The Executioner crawled from under a table, whither he had slunk under the terrible eyes of Ulf the Minstrel. “Has my Sovereign any further need of the services of his humblest slave ?” he asked, with chattering teeth.

“Certainly ; run after Father Cockowax ; and, if you can catch him before he has crossed the court-yard, you have our permission to cut off his head.”

The Executioner started after the holy father, as fast as his legs could carry him.

Then the King boxed his daughter’s ears, and went to bed.

V.

THE NATIONAL CALAMITY.

THE banishment of Ulf the Minstrel was all but followed by a Revolution. To the astonishment of the King, and still more so of the Lord Chancellor, it really appeared as though the Minstrel’s words were about to be verified, and that the kingdom really could not get on without him. In fact, Ulf had been all along a much more important person in the realm than had been supposed. The people had not only feared him a little for his reported supernatural gifts, but also loved him very much indeed for his good-nature and cleverness, for his capital songs, and wonderful traveller’s stories, and still more for sundry unobtrusive services to the commonwealth, which, now he was gone, began to be estimated at their real value. They recalled how, in the first campaign against the Batricians, when a splendid

army (through the enchantments of the enemy) was perishing by inches, of cold and fever, and every species of oracle, incantation, and offering had been tried in vain, Ulf came forward, and said he had consulted his Fairy Grandmother —(in whose existence the people didn't know whether to believe or not, since Ulf, when alluding to her, as he did frequently, seemed to do so more in jest than earnest)—who had told him that the only way to save the army was by providing each soldier with a thick long-sleeved woollen coat, stitched during the second quarter of the moon, and a pair of boots sufficiently strong to exclude water. Ulf particularly insisted on the latter condition; as, he said, the intrusion of a single drop of moisture would destroy the charm. The mystic coats and boots were soon made, I warrant you; for the moon was then in her second quarter, and the poor soldiers had no lack of friends at home to help them when once put in the way of doing it. Ulf pronounced some unintelligible words over the garments, which were immediately despatched to the seat of war. The soldiers recovered as if by magic—indeed, what but magic could have effected so wonderful a cure?—and were quite well enough in a fortnight to give the Bactrians one of the soundest thrashings that warlike people ever experienced. There was some talk of rewarding Ulf the Minstrel for this good service; but, as he was not connected with any of the noble families of the period, it was naturally soon forgotten, and, indeed, Ulf didn't seem in the least to care about it.

On another occasion, now vividly remembered, a pestilence had broken out in the city, killing people by thousands. The Doctors wrote a great many Latin prescriptions, and the Magicians did inconceivably clever things; but all to no purpose. Ulf departed, as he said, to consult his Godmother (strictly ordering that no one should watch his steps), and returned with a pretended message from that doubtful personage, so ridiculous, that all sensible people laughed in his face. He told them that the pestilence would not leave them till the course of the Blue River (which flowed at some hundred yards outside the City-gates) should be turned so as to run through the Town

Pond—a large piece of stagnant water, situate in the most densely inhabited part of the capital. Preposterous as this suggestion appeared, such was the desperate condition of the people, and so completely (said the clever folks) were they the slaves of any mountebank who might choose to talk them over in their terrors, that Ulf found no want of stout fellows to carry out his instructions. A water-course was rapidly constructed, and all the mud and refuse that had been collecting in the Town Pond for years was carried away to the sea. The pestilence immediately subsided; but, of course, the Doctors and Conjurors took the credit of having driven it away.

The common, unreasoning people, however, felt differently; and they had hundreds of similar grounds for looking on Ulf the Minstrel as a sort of Good Genius to their nation. Therefore, when they learnt that their hero had been driven ignominiously from the country, and that his parting words had been a threat, which they felt amounted to a malediction, they were very angry indeed. They were not long in ascertaining that the Lord Chancellor and his family were to blame in the matter; nor were they much longer, having ascertained this, in burning the Lord Chancellor's house down.

That nobleman, with his wife and son, escaped with a few slight brickbat contusions, and shut themselves up in the Palace.

There the popular indignation ceased for the present. The people were, in fact, provided with something to amuse themselves for a few days, sufficiently exciting to make them forget their anger and dark forebodings.

The hundred and twenty-three suitors, in spite of the snubbing they had received from the King and Princess, did not leave the kingdom. The news of the Minstrel's curse having reached them, they all agreed, like brave, loyal gentlemen of the olden time as they were, that they would not leave the object of their common adoration while menaced with an unknown danger. They swore solemnly to league themselves together for her protection. In the meanwhile, as the danger did not make its appearance, they got over the time by quarrelling amongst

themselves as to which of them, in the event of their rescuing their idol from they had not the slightest idea what, would have the greatest claim upon her gratitude, and consequently, upon her affections; so that every day was marked by some new duel or tournament, till at the end of a fortnight there was not a single man in the whole cavalcade left in decent fighting condition.

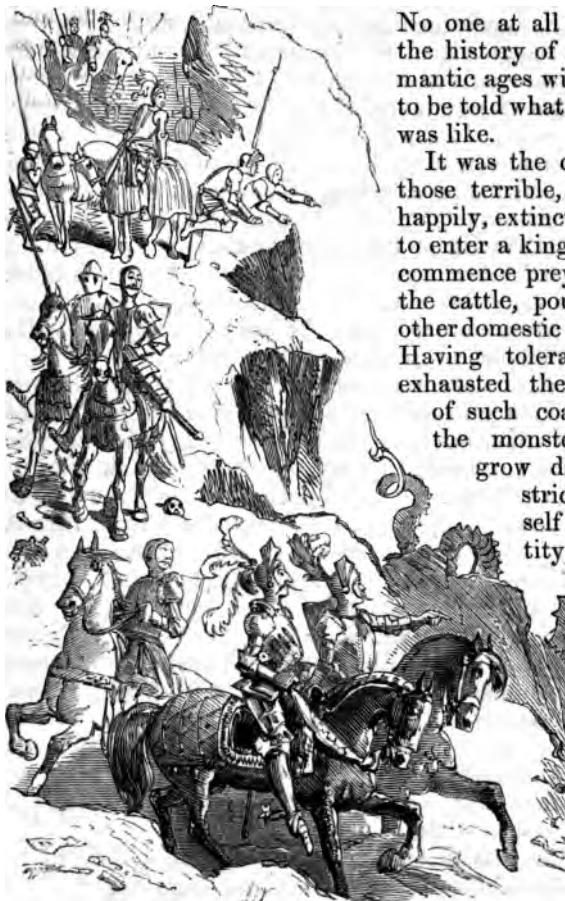


Those who were not absolutely laid up in the Town Hospital, stumped about on wooden legs, or carried their arms in slings and their noses in plasters. Black eyes, cracked skulls, and dislocated shoulders, were among the minor casualties. Taken altogether, they were as miserable a set of cripples as you would wish never to see.

In this condition they received the agreeable intelligence, that a Dragon had made his appearance within the frontiers, and was ravaging the kingdom.

VI.

THE DRAGON.



No one at all versed in the history of these romantic ages will require to be told what a Dragon was like.

It was the custom of those terrible, but now, happily, extinct animals, to enter a kingdom, and commence preying upon the cattle, poultry, and other domestic creatures. Having tolerably well exhausted the supplies of such coarse food, the monster would grow dainty, restricting himself in quantity, but becoming fastidiously exigent as to quality. In order to keep a Dragon moderately quiet

(his first rage of gluttony having been satisfied), it was always found necessary to sacrifice to him a beautiful damsel per diem. When the beautiful damsels had been all eaten, he had to put up with the ugly ones. (It was

part of the Dragon's instinct to get terribly angry if they offered him the ugly ones first.) As it was next to an impossibility to kill a Dragon—none but the greatest heroes of romance having ever accomplished the feat—it stands to reason that the decrease of the youthful female population during the residence of one of those monsters in a kingdom was tolerably rapid. It will also be sufficiently obvious, that, ugly or not, the daughters of noble houses would not be given up as rapidly as plebeian maidens; and that even young Countesses, and Marchionesses in their own right, would have to go, before a Princess. But the turn of the Princess usually came, for all that—so difficult a business was that of Dragon-killing, and so few were the warriors competent to undertake it. Still, as much time was gained for the Princess as possible, in case an efficient champion should turn up.

It was customary to tempt such a very desirable personage to show himself by a public offer of the Princess's hand to whomsoever should destroy the Dragon. The people clamoured loudly for the observance of this rule in the present instance. The King was disposed to accede to it; so was the Princess herself. Diamonduckz had turned wonderfully good and dutiful within a few days. She was no longer the same girl. She said, with tears in her eyes, that she would love the memory of her dear Ulf to her dying day; if any sacrifice on her part could save her father and his faithful subjects a day's trouble, she would make it; and she was sure her dear Ulf, dead or alive, would approve of her doing so. Day after day she implored to be given to the Dragon, to take the place of some poor girl who, as the Princess said, might have a happy married life before her. But, of course, she was not allowed to do anything so unbecoming.

The Lord Chancellor and his wife, being restricted to the Palace, and thrown more in the King's society than ever, were also in great power. They still clung to their ambitious scheme of marrying their deformed son to the Princess, and they stoutly opposed the plan of making the hand of Diamonduckz the prize of the Dragon-slayer. Of course, they knew the prize could never be gained by their

son, and they were determined that nobody else should gain it. So they let the Dragon go on eating up the flower of the land's beauty, while they merely cared for their own family interests—by no means an uncommon case, I am informed, in the history of Governments.

And here let us do honour to the gallant hundred and twenty-three. Dreadful fools and blockheads though they had been for breaking one another's heads and limbs about nothing, yet, nevertheless, did they behave manfully when it was too late. Without hope of reward, scarcely of victory, but from their mere love for Diamonduckz and wish to save her from a terrible death—they all, one after another, as soon as they were able to mount their horses (nay, many of them still crippled invalids), went out to give battle to the Dragon. But, alas! the Dragon gobbled them all up—wooden legs, bandages, and all!

At length the inevitable day arrived, when it was no longer possible to conceal the truth, that the Princess Diamonduckz was the only eatable young lady left in the kingdom. It would be her turn to-morrow to be led up the hill and tied to the post, in front of the Dragon's cave, as had been the fate of many a hundred good little girls before her.

“Don't give way, Papa; I'm quite reconciled. I dare say it will soon be over.” The Princess shuddered a little. “But anything to bring peace for a day: at the end of that time who knows what may happen? Besides, when the monster finds there is no more prey for him he may depart from the land. I am sure my darling Ulf would justify me in being resigned to my fate.”

“Ulf the Minstrel! Ulf the Minstrel!”

“What can that mean?”

“Is it possible?”

The Princess followed her father to the balcony.

What she had scarcely dared to believe possible, was not so; at any rate, it was not true. There was no Ulf the Minstrel there; it was only an angry crowd besieging the Palace—clamouring for his return from banishment.

“My people!” cried the heart-broken old King, whom the prospect of losing his darling had rendered almost sen-

sible, and quite penitent, "what would you have of me? I am a poor foolish old man, only sensible of my errors. I believe with you, that if I had not exiled my truest servant, these evils would never have happened, I would gladly recall Ulf the Minstrel from banishment. I do so. (Loud cheers). But, alas! is it not too late? Where is he? Perchance thousands of miles away. The man who will bring him back to me I will load with riches, whether in time to save further calamities or not. In the mean while any man, gentle or simple, duke or dustman, who will rid the kingdom of this detested Dragon, shall have the Princess in marriage, and shall succeed to our throne."



"Hooray! God save the King! Long live the Princess and Ulf the Minstrel!"

"In a few seconds scouts were flying in every direction (except where the Dragon lived) to spread the intelligence that Ulf the Minstrel's sentence of banishment had been recalled, and that the hand of the Princess was to be the reward of anybody who would kill the Dragon. Somehow or other, there seemed a general belief that Ulf the Minstrel would turn up in time; and the confidence in his Dragon-killing power was universal.

Did Ulf turn up in time? We shall see.

VII.

HOW THE YOUNG COUNT OPTWIG WENT OUT TO KILL THE DRAGON.

"I suppose there is no help for it?" inquired the Chancellor's lady.



"None whatever," replied the Chancellor.

"What a fool you were to allow the old ass to make

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such a promise ; but you shan't hear the last of it in a hurry."

" I don't in the least doubt it, my dear. Still, as the Royal word has been given to an angry mob, why we must even get the Dragon killed, and our son must have the credit of it. Optwig, my pet, have you got your armour on ? "

" Yes, Pa ; but it hurts awful. Oh ! I hope I shan't see the Dragon."

" Don't be afraid, my brave boy ; we have three hundred men-at-arms ready to kill him for you. You and I will stand in a safe place, and see them do it ; then, when they have killed him, you can plunge your sword in the dead body, and return to claim—"

" Oh ! oh ! Ow—ow—ow ? "

" What's the matter with the whelp ? "

" Please to do that for me ; I should be so frightened."

" Of, course, your papa will do all that is necessary, my love—he'd better ! "

" Of course. There, the moon is up ; it is time we set off. The men are all ready. Say good-night to your mamma."

" What ? " asked the lady, in a withering voice.

" You needn't snap my head off, my dear ; I only told your boy to bid you good-night."

" And do you suppose, sir, I am going to let my tender and delicate son depart on such a perilous errand without my protection ? No, sir ; I go with you, if you please."

" As you please, my love," said the Lord Chancellor.

The Lord Chancellor, the Count Optwig his son, and the Lady Gorgona, his wife, departed on their moonlight errand, at the head of three hundred men. The mailed feet of the latter were shod with felt, that their marching might attract no attention. The Lord Chancellor had laid his plans artfully. He did not wish it to be known that his son had received any assistance in the conquest of the Dragon (which he held to be inevitable). His Lordship had a troop of Bactrians in waiting to cut the men-at-arms to pieces when their task should be accomplished, in order that there might be no tale-bearing. The Bac-

tricians, it should be stated, knowing nothing whatever about the Dragon, had been attracted by the mere promise of plunder ; having instructions to withdraw immediately to their own territory. It must be admitted that the Chancellor was a great diplomatist.

We will conclude this chapter briefly.

The men-at-arms disturbed the Dragon in his den. The Dragon came out, and gobbled up the men-at-arms in a few seconds. (The reader can have no idea of the inordinate appetite of these monsters). The Chancellor, his son, and his lady, were too much frightened to run away, so the Dragon gobbled them up too.

I wonder how the Lord Chancellor's lady agreed with the Dragon !

VIII.

NO ULF THE MINSTREL.

THERE was no help for it ! The Dragon had been more restive than ever this morning—tearing trees up by the roots, setting fire to farms with the flame from his nostrils, and behaving in the most outrageous manner. A few poor lads of the city, inspired by hope of the beautiful reward (and, let us do the poor fellows justice, also for love of the Princess, and the wish to do a brave deed), had gone out early to try and fight him ; but the Dragon had gobbled them all up, as usual.

No Ulf the Minstrel made his appearance !

They waited as late in the day as they dared ; but the Dragon began to roar so terribly, from his mountain cave, two miles away, that they feared he would make a descent on the city—and then, Heaven help them all !

As I have said, there was no help for it. Diamonduckz was led out to meet her doom.

She walked quickly out of the Palace, looking very sweet and resigned, dressed in a simple white robe, with no ornament save a single flower in her hair. She passed through crowds of sobbing people, who blessed her at every step. You see, she was the last good little girl left in the city ; and they felt that to lose her would be like losing the light of their eyes or the sunshine in their

houses. She looked so good, and pure, and beautiful, and so fit to live and ornament the earth, that many people who had never known what it was to have or to lose a



child, found themselves half regretting that they had not daughters of their own to offer to the monster in her stead. You may be sure those whose poor lasses had travelled the

same terrible journey before the Princess did not think so ; but they felt all the pain of losing their own darlings a second time as she passed them.

"God bless you, my dear friends, and thank you many times," said the Princess, in a perfectly calm and sweet voice. "Do not weep for me; I am quite happy and resigned. Something tells me that when I have been sacrificed, this terrible scourge will leave you to till your lands in peace. My only regret is, that I was not the first victim; for, as I feel this calamity was brought on you through me (though not willingly, Heaven knows !), it is not unlikely my death would have appeased the angry Powers who sent it. If ever my darling Ulf should appear amongst you again, tell him that I loved him to the last. My only prayer is, that you will receive him kindly, and listen to his wise counsels; and, above all, do not imagine that he has been to blame in this great trouble. He had a fore-knowledge, by his magic art, of a great coming evil, which he knew no one in the kingdom but himself was wise and brave enough to drive away. They would not listen to his counsels, but drove him forth from among us. Perhaps it was his presence had been a protection to our land, and with its withdrawal, the power of unseen enemies was let loose upon us. But the past cannot be recalled. Heaven bless you a thousand times, and farewell, for ever!"

"Ulf! Ulf! where are you?" shrieked a thousand despairing voices. "Ulf! Minstrel! hear us, if you are above the earth! Come back, while there is yet time to save your darling and ours!" But there was no answer save the mountain echoes, and a roar from the distant cave.

The Princess gave one parting smile to the weeping crowd, and with a firm step followed the attendants, who were to deliver her, bound, to the Dragon, outside the city gates.

Where—where was Ulf the Minstrel?

IX.

THE HAZEL FAIRY.

LET us retrace our steps a little, in order to explain a

matter that may appear somewhat extraordinary, namely, that a little spoiled wilful puss, as Diamonduckz was shown to be at the beginning of this story, should, in a time of the severest trial, behave with so much courage and devotion. Perhaps there is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all; and there may be many a thoughtless little lady, who, in times of prosperity, cares for nothing but new frocks and evening parties—with a little flirtation or so; who, nevertheless, when she sees those she loves in danger and affliction, could show herself as noble and self-sacrificing as Diamonduckz. I don't know how this may be, exactly; and wish all such little ladies may be left in the enjoyment of their frocks and parties—with the other item, if they like—as long as possible, without being brought to the trial.

I don't know, either how Diamonduckz might have acted if she had been left to herself. Let us hope, no worse than her neighbours. But left to herself, she can hardly be said to have been.

For the first day or two after Ulf's exile, she was violently angry. Angry with her father; angry with the Chancellor; angry with the Chancellor's wife; angry with Ulf himself, for going away at all (as if he had any choice, poor fellow!) angry with everybody and everything. The Ladies in Waiting vowed there was no going near her—she threw such heavy things at them, and pulled their hair so violently. Even her faithful vulgar old Nurse declared, that if this sort of thing was to go on much longer, she'd rather take in washing or go out to "cheer" than put up with it.

On the evening of the second day, Diamonduckz was sitting in her own room by the fire, bemoaning her hard fate, and complaining that she was the most ill-used girl in the world, when she heard a little sharp Voice, somewhere near her knees, exclaim—

"And do you think that is the way to bring him back again?"

Diamonduckz started. She knew there was nobody in the room but her old Nurse, who, wearied out with being scolded, had fallen to sleep in an easy chair. (Between

ourselves, I believe the old lady had taken *a little drop* of something to make her forget her troubles.)

"If he did come back, and saw you behaving in this manner, he would soon go away again," said the small Voice again.

The Princess looked down. A little figure of an old woman, not more than two feet high, and with a very pretty face, for all its wrinkles, stood on the hearth before her. The little woman had long, nut-brown hair, and wore a cap that seemed like the shell of a huge nut, with the soft part scooped out; her dress was composed of leaves, curiously sewn together; and she carried in her hand a branch, covered with bright green leaves, and the beautiful nodding ringlets of the hazel blossom.

"Who are you?" asked the Princess, in some alarm, as you may believe.

"I am the Hazel Fairy—Ulf the Minstrel's god-mother."

"Then pretty care you've taken of him," said Diamond-duckz, her temper getting the better of her terrors.

"Better than you may think," said the Fairy, drily; "it seems to me, the farther he is away from you the better."

"Oh, pray don't say that! I know I am very naughty; but, surely, never was girl tried as I am—never will be."

"How dare you say that?" asked the Fairy sharply.

"I didn't mean it. I didn't know what I was saying."

"The wife of Ulf the Minstrel must always mean what she says, and know what she is saying."

"Oh! how very dreadful! But bring him back to me, and I will try to do, and be, whatever you wish."

"Girl, I have come to tell you that you may, perhaps, never see your lover again."



"Oh ! I wish I was dead !"

"That is a falsehood — and it entirely depends upon yourself whether you ever have another chance of seeing him, or not."

Diamondduckz trembled violently ; she was awfully frightened at the idea of depending upon herself for the gratification of any of her wishes, a state of affairs she had never been accustomed to.



"Yes," continued the Fairy, "there are many and terrible trials in store for you. If you meet them all bravely and dutifully, and go through them as your conscience dictates, I will accept you as my godson's bride, and protect you as I would him. If you fail in a single point, I abandon you for ever. Remember; I say, remember ! you only require to be reminded, not told of it, that it is no helpless trifle who is fit to be the wife of Ulf the Minstrel. Deserve him, and you may win him. Bear,

even to the last, and do without hesitation, whatever duty may point out ; and at the last, I will not fail to bring about all things for the best. Begin at once ! ”

And the Hazel Fairy vanished.

Diamondduckz wept bitterly for a few moments, and thought her lithe visitor the most unkind person in the world. But soon, to her utmost surprise, she found herself regretting that the little Fairy woman had left her, and feeling that her harsh rough words had brought a sort of comfort with them. She thought of Ulf the Minstrel, no longer with anger, for leaving her alone, but with love and gratitude. She thought how good and wise he was, and how much beloved by all people, capable of loving anybody but themselves. Then she thought what a miserable foolish little thing she had herself been ; how she thought she was honouring Ulf, by consenting to a clandestine engagement with him ; and how wretched they would have been, supposing (as she had originally purposed) she had coaxed her father into consenting to their marriage ; how, in that case, she would have infallibly domineered over her husband, on the score of her superior birth and condescension ; how they would have quarrelled incessantly, and ceased to love each other, and would have died incurably selfish, disagreeable old people.

All these possibilities seemed as things of the forgotten past, now that she had been chastened by sorrow, and fortified by good counsel. She felt less anxious to marry Ulf—even to see him again—than to deserve the least of these unspeakable happinesses. She felt boundless gratitude towards the hard-spoken, uncompromising little Hazel Fairy.

From that moment, she determined to shape her every action by the course she felt would be most approved of by Ulf the Minstrel, and his Fairy godmother.

(It strikes me, that a nocturnal visit from the Hazel Fairy would do no harm to a few young ladies of my acquaintance.)

X.

THE PRINCESS AND THE DRAGON.

THE menials bound the Princess to a stake in front of the

Dragon's cave, whence the heavy breathing of the monster was distinctly heard, and then chased back again down the hill, as fast their legs could carry them, never daring once to look behind.

The poor girl passed a few moments of agonizing suspense; they were trying moments, indeed, but she bore them with tolerable calm. She could not repress a few inward complainings, as to what she felt was a hard fate. She had been tried almost beyond her powers; and now,



at what she felt to be her last moment, the Hazel Fairy, who had promised at last to order all things for the best, had deserted her. She could hear the monster writhing and turning in his cave. The sulphurous vapour of his nostrils almost choked her. "Had the Hazel Fairy kept good faith with her?" she asked. "Yes," she was bound to answer. It was for the best that she should do her duty; it was for the best that she should die, an example of self-sacrifice and devotion, leaving a name that her darling Ulf must love and re-

vere, rather than like a wife that would have been a burden and a reproach to him.

The smoke from the Dragon's cave was followed by fire. Soon the monster's fearful head was visible, his cavernous nostrils sniffing the air fiercely.

The Princess rigidly awaited her doom. Her last coherent thoughts shaped themselves into a blessing on Ulf the Minstrel, and a prayer of thanks for the Hazel Fairy.

The Dragon crawled slowly from his den. Eyeing the helpless victim sidelong, the reptile advanced with a serpentine movement of his colossal frame, and —

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XI.

THE MINSTREL A DAY AFTER THE FAIR.

ALL the shops were shut in the city; all the blinds were down. It was as a day of general mourning. Nobody had the heart to go out—to talk, to move, or to think.

At least an hour had elapsed since the sacrifice of the Princess. The streets were as still as death.

Suddenly, the silence was broken by the sound of a musical instrument in the Grand Square; and a cheerful voice, strangely jarring on the ears of the sorrowing inhabitants, was heard, singing the following words:—

THE ROVER'S SONG.

“I've travelled far beyond the seas,
A-horseback, flying, walking;
I've seen black puddings grow on trees,
I've heard the monkeys talking;
I've seen the land where knives and forks
Are made of India-rubber;
I've lived twelve months inside a whale,
With nought to eat but blubber.
Oh! you, from home who never roam,
But sleep in beds of clover,
You little know the joy and woe
That wait upon the rover.”

“I've been where acorns grow to oaks
In less than half a minute;
I've scooped a pumpkin inside out,
And swung my hammock in it;
I've eaten snakes and saw-dust cakes;
I've ridden flying fishes;
On cows I've looked, born skinn'd and cook'd,
Whose hoofs are pewter dishes.
Oh! you, from home who never roam,
But sleep in beds of clover,
You little know the joy and woe
That wait upon the rover.”

Could it be possible? It was the voice of Ulf the Minstrel.

In a few seconds the Square was full of people. There was Ulf the Minstrel, sure enough, twanging his lute, and capering about the Square, just as if nothing had

happened—just as they remembered him two years ago, when he had made his first appearance in the kingdom.

He evidently knew nothing of the national calamity.



"How now, friends! What is this?" asked the Minstrel, glancing with astonishment at the scared and woe-worn visages by which he was surrounded. "Are you not glad

to see me after my travels? Or have I been deceived? A man some twelve thousand miles from this told me my sentence of banishment had been recalled. Whether or no, it struck me you had been kept quite long enough without me, so come what would——”

“Ulf, Ulf,” said an old neighbour, shaking his head sadly, “you have come an hour too late.”

“Why? What is the matter?”

They told him, as briefly as they could.

Ulf heard the whole with an attentive but perfectly unmoved countenance.

“You are sure I am too late?” he asked, when the spokesman had finished.

“Alas! yes; it is more than an hour since she was given up to the monster.”

“Enough! what is past is past.” The Minstrel’s head fell upon his breast.

“Let the King know that I am here,” he said after a pause.

A dozen volunteers started off in the direction of the Palace.

“Stay!” cried Ulf; “I must see His Majesty alone. No Lord Chancellors, no Chancellors’ wives, this time.”

“Alack!” said the old man who had first spoken, “the Lord Chancellor and his wife, with their ill-favoured son, disappeared last night, and have not since been heard of.”

“Go — there is one good omen!” said Ulf the Minstrel; “may they never again be heard of!”

“Amen!” said the crowd.

The messengers to the King were superfluous. The poor old man, reduced almost to a skeleton by his sorrows, had betaken himself to his daughter’s room, intending to die, surrounded by the objects she had loved in her lifetime. This room overlooked the public Square, and the old sufferer’s feverish ear had caught the sound of the Minstrel’s voice as soon as the quickest of them. He hobbled down stairs as fast as his weak state would allow him.

“Too late! too late, Ulf, boy!” he said, falling hysterically into the Minstrel’s arms, at the foot of the great marble staircase, which he had with difficulty descended.

"Do not say that, sire," said Ulf, encouragingly ; "which of us knows?"

"Alas ! it has been all over with her long ago. It is many, many hours, since they took her away."

"Pardon, sire," said some one ; "it is little more than one."

"May be not ; the time goes slowly without her. But there's no hope, Ulf. The monster gives but short grace."

"Which of you will follow me to the Dragon's den?" Ulf inquired, looking around him.

Which of them would not ? or down the Dragon's throat, if need should be ? There was no fear for the future, now that Ulf the Minstrel was returned. But the past ? Well-a-day ! As Ulf had said, the past was past.

A shout of joy, the first that had been heard within the city walls for months, greeted the intimation that Ulf the Minstrel was going out to meet the Dragon.

"Heaven preserve thee, my boy," said the old King, raising his trembling hands. "But be not too rash ; thy life is precious. We are no longer fit to govern these poor people, if, indeed, we ever were ; we shall want thee to reign for us. We had hoped till the very last, that thou wouldest return in time for her to share my throne with thee."

Another shout greeted the conclusion of this speech. Ulf was to be their King. The nation would prosper at last.

"Thou hearest ! They hail thee already," said the old man, with a pleased look. "And, indeed, why a moment's delay ? This crown has never prospered on our unworthy head. Kneel down, my son!"

Ulf obeyed ; and the old monarch, removing the crown from his own head, placed it upon the Minstrel's.

"People, behold your King !" he said, presenting Ulf to the crowd.

"God save King Ulf !"

The mountain echoes round the city walls had never trembled to such a shout. This time they awakened no answering roar from the Dragon's cave.

Ulf accepted his new dignity with a meek bow. He

sware a brief oath to administer justice, to observe the laws, and exert himself, body, heart and soul, to increase the welfare of his people. Then he said:

"A King's duty is action. Follow me to the Dragon's cave."

"To the Dragon's cave! To the Dragon's cave!"

"But, my son," said the old, or as I suppose I ought now to call him, the ex-King, "you are unarmed."

"I go as I am, sire," said Ulf. "Weapons of steel and brass, it seems to me, have been tried sufficiently. I must use others."

And King Ulf the First led the way to the Dragon's cave!

The whole city flocked out to follow him. The old King, in spite of his ailing condition, insisted on being carried on a litter. Father Cockowax, the chaplain, wholly forgetful of his dignity, tucked up his surplice and ran with the crowd, as eagerly as the dirtiest little boy amongst them. Even the Princess's broken-hearted old Nurse, who had shut herself up in the morning, with a very large bottle, which she declared contained hartahorn and oil for her rheumatics, but which smelt very like the best Jamaica rum, was fain to join the expedition. She walked very unsteadily; but this she attributed to her grief for the Princess, which she declared had shaken her terribly. Even Bimbo, the jester, who had not made a joke for several months, crept out of the hayloft, where he had taken up his abode since the first appearance of the Dragon, and sneaked after the procession with a doleful countenance.

They came in sight of the Dragon's cave, Ulf the Minstrel far in advance of any of his subjects.

The Dragon was not visible. He was doubtless reposing after his late meal.

His late meal! A shudder ran through the crowd, as they saw the stake to which the Princess had been bound, with the cords severed, and no Princess to be seen!

Ah! it was all over with poor Diamonduckz. How they hoped their new King would put the monster to the cruellest death that could be conceived!

"Let no one approach," said King Ulf, in an authoritative voice, "while I enter the cavern."

The crowd drew back and held their breath, as King Ulf, calmly and with an expressionless face, having no other weapon than the light dagger hanging from his minstrel's girdle (which he did not even draw), entered the monster's den!



There was a moment of breathless suspense. The people held their ears, expecting to be deafened by that hideous roar with which they were but too familiar. Not a sound was heard. Perhaps their champion had caught the monster asleep and despatched him.

The moments seemed hours!

At length—

XII.

THE END.

KING ULF, the Minstrel, emerged from the cavern, with the Princess Diamondduckz — alive and unhurt — hanging

lovingly on his arm, and smiling up at his handsome placid countenance.

Who could believe his eyes?

No one, till the Princess had been cuddled, and kissed, and mauled ; first, by her wondering old Father ; then by her snuffy, drunken old Nurse ; then by Father Cockowax, who danced round her during the operation in the most unclerical manner, and shouted the chorus of a popular nigger melody ; then by Bimbo, the jester, who wept dolefully, after the manner of funny people generally, when not engaged in the exercise of their professional duties ; and, finally, by at least one-third of her father's late subjects, who wept, and danced and shouted, and tossed up their caps, and poked one another in the ribs, and tumbled over head and heels on the grass, and performed all sorts of indispensable absurdities, like a set of frantic, delighted madcaps as they were.

Then, and not till then (and, by-the-bye, not till the poor Princess's clothes had been half torn off her back, in the universal hugging), the belief really began to gain ground that the apparition in white was no other than the lost Diamonduckz, in solid flesh and blood ; and then did Ulf, the Minstrel King, take her lovingly by the hand, and kneel with her before her father, imploring the old man's blessing.

"My blessing — a thousand times," faltered the poor old King, through his blinding tears. "She is yours, with all I have on the earth."

"Before I rise, your Majesty," said Ulf, in a low voice, "grant me one favour?"

"My son, you are the sole monarch here ; it is for you to command."

"Only in your name, sire, while you live, which, I trust, may be for many happy years."

"Speak your will, my son."

"That before any one moves from this place, the Princess and myself be united in the presence of all these witnesses."

"Our own wish. Where is the Holy Father ?"

"The holy father was engaged in a friendly game at leap-

frog with some little boys of his acquaintance. His Reverence looked a little disconcerted at finding public attention turned towards him while so occupied; but he soon recovered his gravity, on finding that his professional services were required.

In those days, the blessing of a priest, in the presence and with the consent of the bride's father, was all the marriage ceremony that the law required.

Ulf and the Princess Diamonduckz were pronounced man and wife, amidst the deafening shouts of the multitude.

"So, that's all right," said the happy bridegroom, drawing a long breath, and with a smile of triumph and happiness — the first emotion of any kind he had betrayed since his reappearance.

"I believe I am the happiest old King on earth," said his ex-Majesty; "or rather, I should say, the happiest old man—all the happier for being no longer a King. I feel as if I, too, could play leapfrog. Will your Reverence oblige me with a back? But we are, perhaps, not yet strong enough. And yet, Heaven forgive me for feeling happy, when I think of the poor creatures whom thou didst not come in time to save, my son."

"How do you know that?" asked the married man, with a look of mysterious import.

A new thrill of hope—of hope unhopecd for, ran through the assembly. Who knew the limits of Ulf the Minstrel's power?

"Is it possible; can such happiness be yet in store? But let us have a sight of this terrible monster? I suppose it is safe to approach his dead body."

A second smile played on the intelligent features of Ulf, the bridegroom. But this time it was a queer, waggish, unexplainable sort of smile.

"You are labouring under a slight mistake," he said drily: "I have not killed the Dragon."

"No?"

How the teeth chattered, and the knees trembled! They had hallooed before they were out of the wood. The Dragon was still alive!

' Why, you stupid people,' said Ulf, laughing heartily; 'you don't suppose I am such an ass as to commit suicide, do you? '

" No trifling, my son—Explain."

" Why, you are all ten times duller than I took you for. Have you not already divined, that—"

" What? "

" THAT I WAS THE DRAGON !!! "

His late admirers recoiled from him with a yell of horror, all but his faithful little bride, who clung to him more lovingly than ever.

" Don't tear me to pieces till you've heard all about it!" said Ulf, still laughing at their angry terror. " First, let me set your minds at ease. I have it in my power to repair all damages. Now hear the rest :"—Ulf addressed himself to his father-in-law—" when you turned me out of the kingdom I felt very angry, and not altogether safe. I knew that confounded Chancellor and his wife were my mortal enemies, and I had reason to dread their animosity ; so I ran to my godmother, the Hazel Fairy (about whom her little Majesty here can tell you something), for advice and assistance. I should tell you, that my worthy godmother, though a very good Fairy, is not a very powerful one. At this particular juncture, she was rather out of spells. All she could do for me, was to transform me into the form of any animal I might choose to select, with power to resume my original shape at will, and cancel all acts performed by me during the period of my enchantment. As I was very much enraged at the treatment I had received, and thought of a few people in this kingdom who would be none the worse for a little eating, I requested her to change me into a Fiery Dragon, the largest and most terrible of the species. The old lady was very much shocked ; but, having passed her word, was obliged to submit to my decision. You know pretty well all the rest. It was no particularly bad plan. I felt very certain that it would end in Diamond-duckz being given up to me at last. Then I intended to reassume my own form, and make off with her quietly ; but seeing things take a much more favourable turn than I anticipated, I have altered my plans as you perceive.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will wait a moment, I will restore to you your sons and daughters, whom you suppose to have been eaten. So they were: but as it was only under the influence of enchantment, it was merely a matter of form. I am sorry to have put you to so much inconvenience, but I hope to atone for it by future benefits."

Ulf the Minstrel went to the mouth of the cave and repeated some magic words. In an instant, a countless troop of girls and young men—the former all who had been offered up as sacrifices to the Dragon; the latter, their champions—brothers, cousins and sweethearts, who had fallen in attempting their rescue—bounded out of the cavern into their parents' arms.

You may be sure the good people were too happy to get their children back again, to feel any ill-will towards Ulf the Minstrel for the trick he had played them.

"Wonder of wonders!" said the amazed old King. "But there are yet others, my son: the brave gentlemen who were your rivals for my daughter's hand?"

"To be sure! I forgot them. Step this way, gentlemen."

Ulf repeated his incantations, and the hundred and twenty-three illustrious suitors marched out of the cavern, in exactly the same state as when they had left the city—wooden legs, splinters, black eyes, and all; not a damage more or less.

They were profuse in their gratitude to him whom they considered their deliverer.

But Ulf was too honest to take to himself praises that were not his due. He frankly informed the gallant cavaliers of the stratagem he had made use of, with all its results. The Princes were a little incensed at first; but they wisely considered among themselves, that a man whose supernatural connections enabled him to transform himself into a Dragon, capable of devouring half a kingdom, and then to resume his own form at will, was not a safe man to be angry with. So they complimented Ulf on his adroitness, and the Princess and the kingdom on their choice of a master; wished them all many happy

years, and took their departure, each to return to his own country.

I should state here, that each knight, ere leaving the



kingdom, found in his lodging a handsome present, sent as a keepsake of affection and gratitude from the Princess Diamonduckz and her husband, the King Regent, late Ulf

the Minstrel. So the rival Princes went away with as good a heart as their wooden legs and black eyes would let them.

"And now," said Ulf the Minstrel, "are there any more? For, recollect, when I was a Dragon, I obeyed the instincts of my species, and gobbled up all that came in my way, without taking any particular account of numbers."

"One moment," said the old King. "My Lord Chancellor, with his wife and son, disappeared last night. Do you know anything of them?"

"To be sure I do. I ate them all; and uncommonly tough the old lady was, to be sure."

"Then, let me implore you, as a great favour——"

"To restore them to life?"

"By no means; to leave them where they are."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Ulf the Minstrel.

A wild shout from the populace greeted this decision, which more than restored to Ulf the Minstrel any amount of popularity the discovery of his having taken such terrible liberties with their families might have lost him. The man who would free them from the Lord Chancellor, and especially from the Lord Chancellor's lady, was clearly the man for them at any price.

So the Lord Chancellor, his Lady and the Count Optwig, his son, were not restored to life. Henceforth the kingdom began to prosper.

* * * * *

That evening, the old King, his son-in-law, the King Regent, and his daughter Diamondduckz (who defied all rules of Court etiquette, and insisted on sitting on her husband's knee, peeling the largest walnuts, and selecting the ripest peaches for him) sat late over their dessert.

The town was all ablaze with bonfires and illuminations. Shouts from the crowd found their way over the Royal Gardens, and crept in at the dining-room windows. The names of Ulf the Minstrel and Diamondduckz, his queen, were heard, mingled with the heartiest good wishes for their prosperity.

"My son," said the old King, gravely, when he had listened to a detailed account of the Minstrel's Dragon adventures, "you have given us all a terrible lesson."

"It struck me that you were in want of something of the kind," answered Ulf the Minstrel, kissing his pretty wife.



L'Envoy.

I don't know that I have anything more to say that is particularly worth saying.

Stop! Those three hundred men-at-arms who had gone out on the Chancellor's expedition against the Dragon! Ulf, by the exercise of his charm, restored them all to life, and they became the most faithful of his body-guards.

And who was Ulf the Minstrel?

Nobody ever knew—not even his pretty, dutiful little wife,—who, indeed, never cared to inquire, being content to know what he was, without troubling herself as to the

"who." It is true, that after the old King's death, when Ulf became a great monarch in his own right, certain Court sycophants attempted to make out a great pedigree for him, proving him to be descended from an elder branch of the Royal Family of the kingdom, and, by consequence, rightful heir to the Throne. But Ulf treated all such absurd pretensions with the most withering scorn, declaring that he would rather be the first of a powerful line than the last of a weak one.

And so Ulf was a very good king (as well as a good husband and father); and as he, in that character, kept himself and his people constantly occupied with measures for their own improvement, they never had much time to inquire into the matter. Moreover, notwithstanding his greatness, victories, and wisdom, he never changed in his character or behaviour towards his old acquaintances, but continued to amuse them to his dying day with his merry songs and incredible travelling stories, as if there no such thing as a Throne in the world. Why, the name of Ulf the Minstrel stuck to him for all his kingship, and was considered more honourable than any princely title whatever. So he was known as Ulf the Minstrel, down to the latest records of the kingdom; and many noble families were only too proud to cut one another's throats for the honour of being considered Ulf the Minstrel's descendants.

THE END.



